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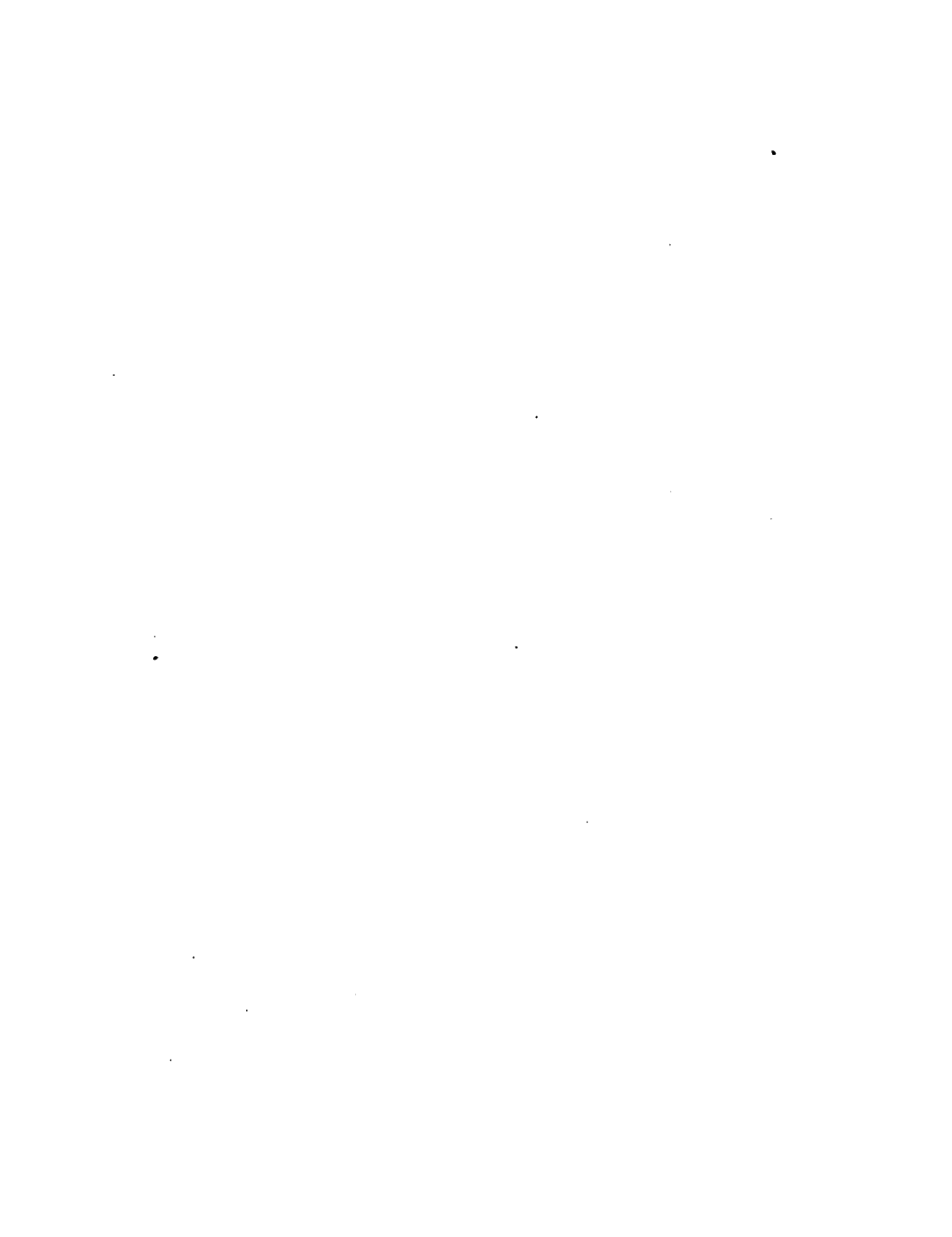
The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover is dark green or black with a complex, embossed border. The border consists of a series of repeating floral and foliate motifs, creating a rectangular frame. In the center of the cover is a gold-tooled label. The label has a decorative, slightly irregular rectangular shape with ornate corners. Inside the label, the text "Cousin Trix" is written in a large, stylized, cursive font. Below it, "and her" is written in a smaller, simpler font. At the bottom of the label, "Welcome Tales" is written in a large, stylized, cursive font, matching the top line. The entire label is surrounded by gold-tooled decorative elements, including a central floral motif at the top and bottom, and smaller foliate designs on the sides.

Cousin Trix
and her
Welcome Tales

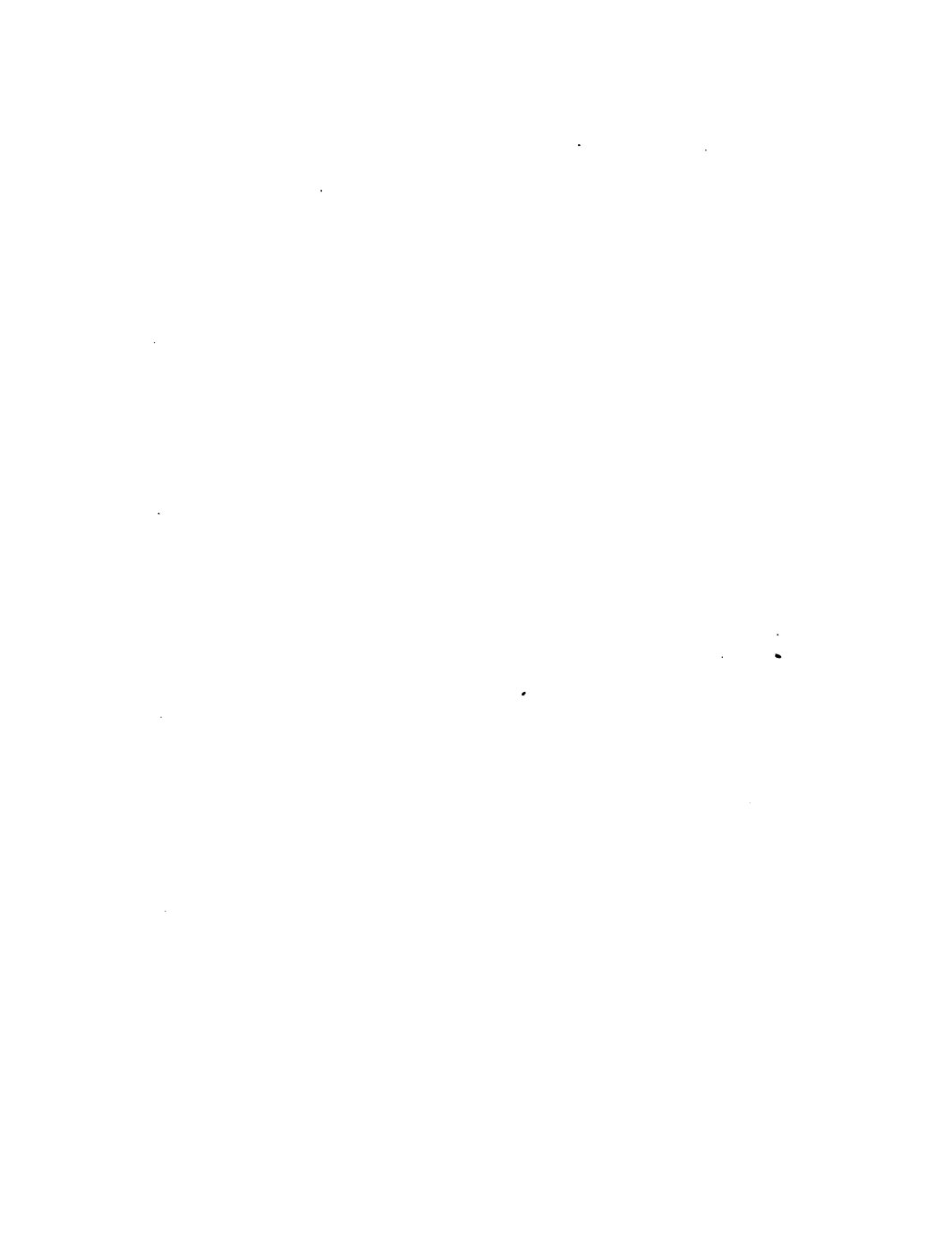


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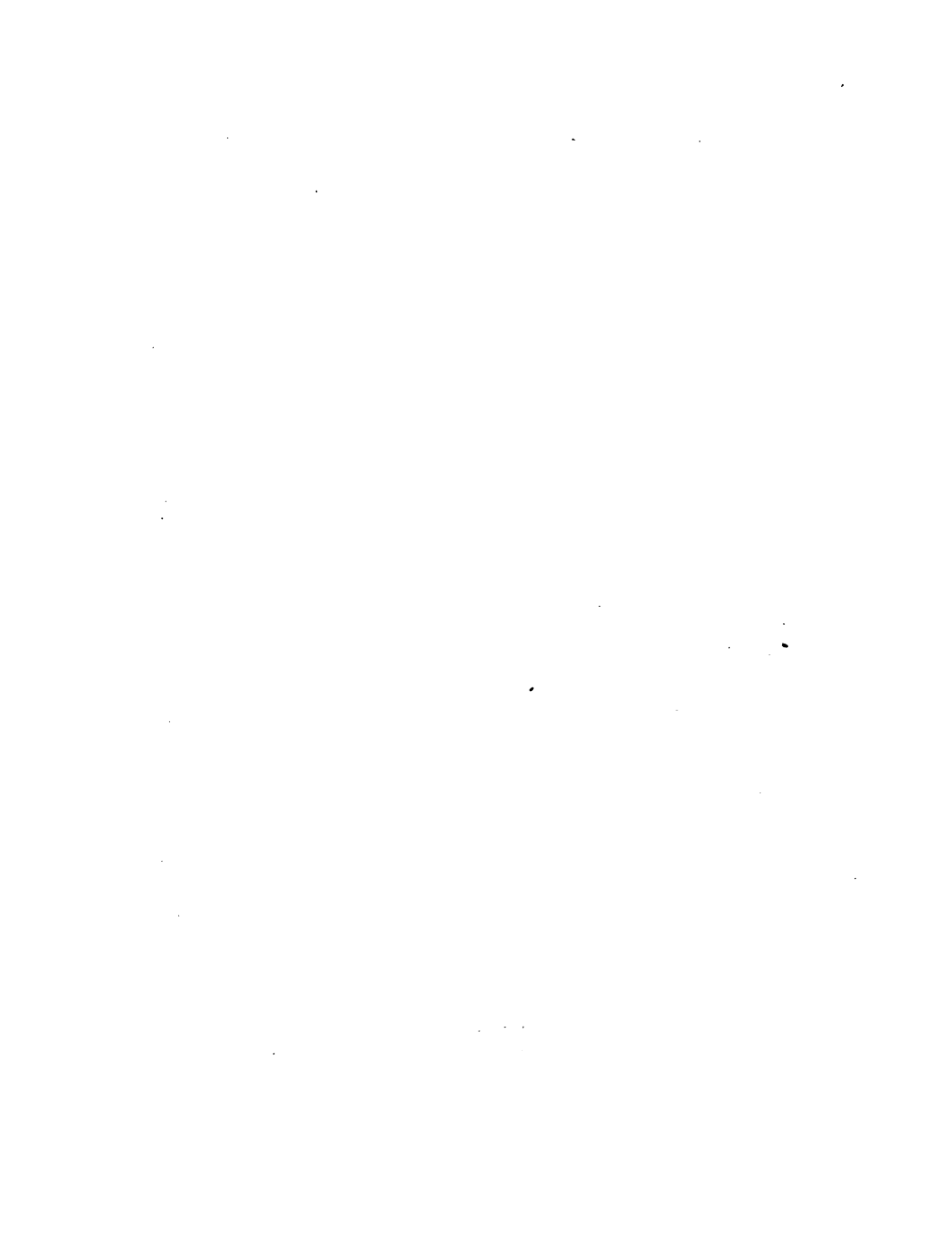


















THE DWARF AND LORD EDGAR GALLOPING HOME.

PAGE 169.

COUSIN TRIX

AND HER WELCOME TALES

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'PLAY-ROOM STORIES,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. W. KEYL



LONDON: GRIFFITH AND FARRAN

SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERRY AND HARRIS

CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

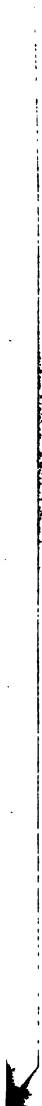
MDCCCLXVIII.

250. q. 359.

EDINBURGH : T. CONSTABLE,
PRINTER TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

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COUSIN TRIX.

IT had got too dark to read or work, and the children were too cross to play; all of them, at least, except little Mabel—‘Queen Mab,’ as they called her—who never lost her temper (though she had lost a great deal else, poor little thing); and the reason they were cross was that they had been shut up in the schoolroom against their will.

Now there are undoubtedly greater hardships than to be made to stay for a couple of hours or so in a large, pleasant, bright, warm room, with perfect liberty to amuse yourself in any manner that you please; and, indeed, as a general rule, there was nothing that the children liked better than to be left to themselves by their governess in this way after lessons were over. But general rules, though they are all very well, don't

in the least touch particular cases. It is one thing to be contented to play in the schoolroom when you know that nothing amusing is going on anywhere else in the house, but another affair altogether to be shut up there when you are certain that all sorts of delightful things that you would like to have a hand in are happening down-stairs. And this was the case with these children to-day. There was *ever* so much going on down-stairs, and they wanted to be in the midst of it ; and they had been getting fractious and snappish and ill-tempered and doleful for the last hour because they were not, and had been grumbling and bemoaning themselves until they had quite come to believe that they were so many little ill-used victims.

There were four of them altogether. The eldest was a lank, gangling, loose-limbed boy of twelve, who had been dubbed 'Hercules' in derision during his early years, and had been commonly called so ever since (though his proper name was Jack, not Hercules); *he* had deposited himself at present upon the rug before the fire, and was sprawling there, doing nothing, at full length. The second was a pretty little girl of ten, called Daisy, who, having discontentedly curled herself into a large arm-chair, was finding nothing better to do as she sat there than to try and poke holes with **her** fingers in its holland covering. The third, who **was** called Roger, and was a short fat little fellow of nine, had clambered up upon the table in the middle

of the room, and was gloomily amusing himself there in a way that to a spectator might have seemed monotonous, by slowly swinging his legs backwards and forwards, like a pair of pendulums going contrary ways; and the fourth and youngest was little Queen Mab, who, in the midst of the general idleness and discontent, was quietly sitting in her small chair by the fireside, with her tiny crutches by her side (for she was lame), knitting away with her busy fingers as fast as she could knit.

It was a large, old-fashioned, rambling house, with wide oak staircases and big wainscoted rooms, and many pictures on the walls that the children loved to look at. There was one in particular that they cared for above all the rest—a picture of a lady who had lived long ago, but who smiled and looked down upon them always while they played, as if she were living still. It was a full-length portrait, as large as life, and many a time they had thrown open their schoolroom door in play-hours, that while they ran about they might see its sweet face as it hung on the great opposite staircase wall; and many a time, limping along the landing on her crutches, little Mabel had stopped in passing it to nod and smile up into the beautiful and happy eyes that seemed always to be looking down so kindly upon her.

All at once, as the children sat just now idle and sulky and silent, the door was opened, and if ever por-

traits stepped down from their frames you would have thought that the picture of that lady had done so from hers, for somebody was standing on the threshold with just the same bright face that she had, and the same sunny curling hair. But it was *not* the lady in the picture. You and I might have fancied that it was, but the children knew better ; the children knew all about her ; and the moment she had put her head into the room up they started, as if the very sight of her had brought life into them all. In an instant Roger, on the table, gave a shout, and Jack, on the rug, scrambled to his feet, and Queen Mab threw down her knitting-needle and clapped her tiny hands, and Daisy made one single leap almost into the middle of the floor, and cried out joyfully,

‘ Oh, Cousin Trix ! ’

Upon which Cousin Trix (they called her Cousin Trix for short, but her full name was Beatrix) gave a laugh and shut the door, and let all the children gather round her.

‘ Well, chickens,’ she said, as soon as she had got into the midst of them, ‘ you seem to be amazingly quiet here.’

‘ Quiet ! I should just think we were ! ’ grumbled one or two of them discontentedly.

‘ And *why* should you just think you were ? What have you been doing ? Have you been asleep ? ’ demanded Cousin Trix immediately.

Now Hercules, to his shame, *had* been almost half asleep as he lay on the hot rug, and Cousin Trix asked this question with her eyes so full upon his face that he was filled with a sense of sudden confusion, and in another moment would have blurted out how things had been with him, if Roger and Daisy had not, luckily for him, come unconsciously to his relief. *They*, having been wide awake, and full of a bitter sense of injury, had no hesitation in replying instantly.

‘No!’ cried Roger, bluntly and scornfully; and—

‘Oh no, we haven’t been *asleep*,’ said Daisy piteously; ‘but we *are* so dull.’

‘And what in the world are you dull about?’ inquired Cousin Trix, in a tone of unlimited amazement.

‘Because we’ve been shut up here; and it’s a shame!’ cried Roger with indignation.

Upon which Cousin Trix, instead of looking sorry, or sympathetic, or shocked, or amazed, or anything else that you would have expected from her, simply burst out laughing, just as if Roger had uttered some good joke.

‘Oh, little geese! little geese!’ she said. ‘Why, where in the world *would* you be shut up, if not here?’

‘But we don’t want to be shut up *anywhere*,’ cried Jack, who had recovered himself, and was also wide awake now. ‘Why should *we* be shut up more than anybody else?’

‘You are *not* shut up more than anybody else, Hercules,’ answered Cousin Trix. ‘What puts that in your

head? Do you think there are any of us who can go everywhere we like, and do everything we please, or that it would be good for us if we could?' said Cousin Trix, so rapidly that Jack was quite taken aback, as if she had fired at him, and, not having been prepared for any such assault, had to stare at her and take a deep breath before he could get over it. When he *had* partially got over it—

'Why, I'm sure *you* can do most things that you please,' he said in an aggrieved and half-reproachful tone; for he felt quite hurt at the way in which she had been trying to take him in. 'Nobody makes *you* stay in one room when you want to go somewhere else.'

'Don't they, Hercules?' responded Cousin Trix instantly, and opened her eyes with such a look of astonishment that before another word was spoken Jack felt that he must have made some terrible mistake. 'Not when they make me sit at dinner for two whole hours every day of my life!' cried Cousin Trix.

'Oh! but I thought people liked that,' said Daisy, amazed.

'I don't like it, Daisy,' replied Cousin Trix. 'I like it so little, that before one-half of the time is over I always want to get up and run away. Do you know (only you mustn't mention it!) I almost go to sleep sometimes. Oh, you can't think what I go through! Obligated to sit for two hours without moving, on one *seat*. Only think of it, Jack!'

And she looked in Jack's face so tragically, that, though he was half inclined to laugh, he felt doubtful whether it would be civil to do it, and so tried hard to restrain himself and look properly impressed, until she suddenly relieved him by breaking into such a merry peal of laughter herself that all the four children burst out laughing too for sympathy, and because they couldn't help it ; though, in fact, they hardly knew in the least what she was so much amused about ; and she did not try to tell them.

However, they all laughed heartily, and that was one good thing accomplished, for their tempers felt decidedly the better after they had done it, and instead of grumbling any more they gathered round Cousin Trix's chair, and began to try how they could make the most of her. For Cousin Trix's presence amongst them was not an everyday pleasure by any means. Her own house was a long way off, and they only saw her for a week or two now and then, when she came to stay with their father and mother. She had come now, moreover, to pay her last visit to them for a long time, for she was going to be married, and after her marriage she and her husband meant to go abroad, and the children knew that they might not see her again for years to come ; and they were all very sorry whenever they thought of this, for there was hardly anybody in the world that they loved more than Cousin Trix. Only they did not think of it very often. She was here in

the meantime, and she was going to be married here from their own house ; and the excitement of all this was almost enough for the moment to put the future out of their heads.

They began to talk very merrily round Cousin Trix's chair. It is always the first step towards good humour that it is so difficult to take ; the others generally follow after, quite naturally. In two or three minutes the children had entirely forgotten how badly used they had been, and were all chattering away like magpies. Except, indeed, that little Mabel sat quieter than she often did ; for, in spite of her lameness, Queen Mab was in general as full of brightness as any of them, and whenever she was not suffering actual pain (which, however, she *had* to suffer at times very sharply), she was as gay and happy as a little bird : but now she sat very still, and only listened and smiled while the others talked.

So, after a few minutes, noticing how quiet she was, Cousin Trix bent forward and took her out of her little chair into her own arms.

' My birdie is tired to-day. What shall I do for her ? ' she asked. ' Monkeys,' she said, turning her head round for a moment to the other three, ' hold your chattering tongues, and don't make her head ache ! '

' But we've been holding our tongues all the afternoon,' objected Roger, relapsing into rapid discontent.

' *Who* cares if you have, Stupid ? ' instantly retorted

Hercules, who was always Mabel's champion; and he looked in his brother's face with such contempt that Roger, discomfited, beat a precipitate retreat. At which Jack felt that he had cleared the way neatly and dexterously for whatever was to come next.

But what *was* to come next?

'Cousin Trix, you might tell us a story,' Queen Mab said, all at once. 'You haven't told us one yet since you came.'

And then immediately all the others called out, 'Oh, yes, tell us a story!'

'Something pretty!' cried Daisy, who loved pretty things, and was very pretty, too, herself.

'Yes, and funny,' entreated Roger, who had no notion of there being any good in a story unless it made him laugh.

'No; let it be a true story, Cousin Trix,' exclaimed Jack, who was beginning to think that it was beneath the dignity of his twelve years to listen to tales made out of people's heads.

'Tell us anything you like,' said Queen Mab, and curled herself up into Cousin Trix's arms.

So Cousin Trix said she would do her best, though it was not likely that she should please them all; and, after thinking for a few moments, while the children took their seats, she told them this tale.



POOR OLD NEPTUNE.

I CAN'T understand it ; it's no use trying ! I know I'm nothing but a stupid blundering old watch-dog,' poor Neptune said to himself, and stretched himself out in the stable-yard with a great sigh, and laid down his shaggy head between his paws. Yes, it was no use trying to understand it all ; he could make neither head nor tail of this world.

It was a strange thing to him how all the other dogs and beasts about the place seemed able to make out so much more about it than he could. There was Frisk, for instance, the little black-and-white terrier : now Frisk seemed to know everything, and never to be in a moment's perplexity from morning to night. And what a merry life he led ! And there was Juno, the beautiful greyhound, who followed her mistress when she walked

about the garden with such a calm, dignified, stately air, as if she were worthy to be the companion of kings and queens, and had no doubt about the matter. And there was Hector, the great Newfoundland, who, big as he was, never seemed (as Neptune always did) to be in anybody's way—whom every one loved and petted, and who was so good-natured, and so clever too ; why, you couldn't say a word to Hector but he seemed to understand it ; he would listen when his master spoke to him, looking in his face the while for all the world as if he meant to answer him,—as if the very syllables were on his tongue, and the only sorrow he ever had was the sorrow that he couldn't utter them. *Hector* didn't find the world a strange, confused, perplexing place, like poor old Neptune. It was all very smooth and very pleasant to him, and quite as comprehensible as there was any need for it to be. And he would shrug his shoulders when Neptune now and then would try to tell him how sad and bewildering *he* found it, and would think to himself (though he never *said* it, for he was both a very well-bred and a kind-hearted dog, who never liked to hurt other people's feelings), that the old fellow must really be falling into his dotage to talk such stuff.

But Neptune was not falling into his dotage : it was not that. He had never been a bit brighter than he was at present, or almost a bit handsomer ; and he certainly was not handsome now. He had a rusty

brownish-black coat, without any gloss upon it,—a rough, dusty, ill-kept coat, that had been allowed to take care of itself all its life, and had succeeded in that business very badly indeed. And he had a broad stiff back, and short thick legs, with one of them a little shorter than the other three, for he had fallen into trouble one day when he was very young, and had lamed himself for life, and at the same time had lost the better half of one of his ears. You see he had no beauty at all to boast of. I don't think anybody, however well inclined, could have looked at him, and have said anything civil about him whatever, except that he had a good honest face. He certainly *had* that—as honest a face as you ever saw in your life. And yet it was a very sad face, too, for it had no brightness in it, but was all full of perplexity, and dull bewilderment and wistfulness, as if he knew quite well (as, indeed, he did) what a stupid, ugly, awkward dog he was, and could, sorrowfully, never make out why it should be so. And he always looked as if he were trying to understand the things that went on about him (which was true too); and as if he were trying to ask questions with his stupid, patient, loving eyes, though knowing all the time, and being quite hopeless about it, that he should never get any answers to them.

Neptune passed his time almost entirely in the stable-yard. That was his proper place, he knew;

and though he got tired of it sometimes, and sometimes, when he had the chance, would trot away for an hour or two—perhaps down as far as the village to see what was going on there, or, if the day was hot, it might be only as far as to the road outside the lodge gates, where a good many people passed up and down,—yet he was generally glad enough after a while to come back again to the place he knew best; for the outer world never treated him very kindly, and if at home he was roughly treated too at times, still it *was* home, where he had a right to be, which nobody disputed. And so he would lay himself down again contentedly, when he returned from any of these wandering expeditions, in his kennel in the stable-yard; and whenever any of the stable-men passed near him would wag his short bunchy tail at them in a friendly way, as much as to say, ‘I’m glad to be home again; after all, this is the best place for me!’—sometimes for hours together; though very likely nobody would ever take the least notice of him all the time. But he was quite used to no one taking any notice of him. Everybody took notice of Juno and Hector and Frisk, but poor old Neptune might wag his tail at people, and look up in their faces the whole day long, and it was a chance if any one so much as ever once gave him a single kind word in return.

There are a great many sorts of dogs in the world, you know, just as there are a great many sorts of

people. Now Neptune, and those three dogs who lived with him (or *near* him rather, for Frisk was the only one of them who gave him much of his company), were all four as unlike one another as they could possibly be; and, though on the whole they got on in a friendly enough way together, they thought and felt so differently about most matters that I don't think you could easily have found any single subject upon which Hector and Juno and Frisk would have entirely come to the same conclusion, with the sole exception that they all agreed in what they thought of Neptune. They could always talk of *him* with such entire unanimity that it was perfectly delightful.

Of course they all looked down upon him.

'I really cannot see what such creatures can have been brought into the world for,' Juno would say superciliously, flinging back her small sleek head. 'The mere thought of existence in such a shape makes me shudder!' And then she would quiver all over her delicate body, and pretend that she couldn't possibly help it (which was a piece of affectation that took in nobody).

'Well, his ugliness is bad enough,' Frisk would strike in with next; 'but even that isn't so objectionable to me as his stupidity. I don't set up for being anything very clever myself,' Frisk would say demurely (just as if he supposed the others would believe him), 'I don't set up for being anything very clever myself;

but when you're expected to associate with a dog that has no brains *at all*, you know,—upon my word, it's a little too much!'

'It certainly is one of the strangest cases I ever knew,' Hector perhaps would remark thoughtfully after this. 'A better-natured creature, I believe, never lived ; but any other dog so entirely devoid of all attractiveness, either of mind or body, I for one unquestionably never came across.'

Yet, though they were thus completely agreed in their opinion of him, they did not by any means all treat him quite in the same way. Juno always behaved to him in the haughtiest manner imaginable, but the other two, each according to his own fashion, were not unkind to him. Indeed Frisk, though he professed, and felt too, the greatest contempt for him, belonged to that class of very lively little dogs who would rather have any company than none ; and so, whenever Hector and Juno were out of reach, or sleepy, or disinclined to have a game, you might be sure that in a very little while you would see Frisk come racing up to Neptune in the stable-yard, and, though he pretended to be so terribly impatient of the poor old dog's stupidity, the truth was that there were not many things he liked better than to show off his sharp wits before him, and let him see what a fine clever young dog he was ; which, indeed, poor Neptune perceived clearly enough, and wondered over it excessively, puzzling his poor

old brains day after day over that sad question of why *he* should be so unlike all the other dogs about him, till, quite hopeless and bewildered, he would lay himself down at last, and put his muddled old head down upon his paws, feeling that he couldn't understand the reason of anything, and that there was nothing for him to do but to give it all up as a bad job.

He had just resigned himself to this conclusion to-day, and had shut his eyes, as he lay in the sunshine, to try and sleep away his troubles, when one of the few pleasures that fell at rare intervals in his way chanced suddenly to come to him. His master had a little son of five or six years old—a fine little fellow, whom everybody liked about the place, and who liked everybody and everything, down even to old Neptune. They did not let him come often into the stable-yard, but whenever he *did* come in he was sure to canter up to where Neptune was, and stroke his shaggy, rough head, and get astride upon his back, and try to teach him (though all in vain, for the foolish old dog, strive as he would, could never learn, or even so much as guess, what in the world it was that he was wanted to do) to give a paw and shake hands. There was nothing that Neptune loved so much as he did the sight of little Harry coming careering through the yard. If ever the poor, pathetic face looked bright, it looked bright then, and he would run up to the far end of his chain (if he happened to be chained, and he mostly was), and would stand there

wagging his imperfect tail till you would have thought he wanted to wag it off, and pawing the ground with his impatient feet, and writhing his stiff back, and giving short, sharp barks and yelps that were meant for loving calls and words of welcome.

The little lad came into the yard to-day, holding his father's hand, and skipping about him, and chattering away as fast as his little tongue could go ; and as soon as ever he saw him, up sprang old Neptune and set his tail going. 'Oh, Master Harry!' he began to say, in his dog's language, 'I am so glad you have come! Oh, dear Master, I love you so much! Oh, little Master, take me out with you, as you did that one day long ago, and we'll roll about together in the fields upon the soft green grass. Little Master! dear little Master! take me with you, for I love you so!' And in this way he went on, over and over again.

But he had only the faintest shadow of a forlorn hope that Harry had come to take him out with him. That was a thing that had only happened once already in all his life, and he really hardly believed, though he kept asking for it continually, that it would ever happen again. So when Harry came to him, and merely began to talk to him, and pat his head and pinch his ears, and so on, in the usual way, he was not particularly disappointed, but set himself cheerfully to make the most of what was given him, like a sensible and wise old dog. He was not going out into the fields. Well, that was

hardly to have been expected ; but at least he had what was next best to that—he had beside him, for the moment at least, the creature who was kindest to him in all the world. And so, though Harry only stayed with him for five minutes, that little visit was enough to make all the rest of the day quite bright to Neptune. He lay in his place after his little master had gone, and thought, ‘ Perhaps he will come back to-morrow ! Who knows but that he may come back to-morrow and take me out with him ! If I could but learn that strange thing that he tries to teach me about my paws, I do think he would come oftener. Oh, I wish I could find out what he wants ! I wonder if I could find it out if I were to lie quite still here, and try to think ! ’ said Neptune to himself. And with that he settled himself in a comfortable position, and shut his eyes, that nothing might distract his attention while he gave himself up to meditation ; and the result was that in ten minutes the thick-headed, dull old dog was fast and placidly asleep, dreaming perhaps of little Harry far away, and the green fields.

He had wondered if Harry would come back to-morrow, but he little guessed, either he or anybody, what was going to happen before that morrow came. It might have been four or five hours after the little lad had been in the stable-yard, when Neptune, having had his sleep out, began to be aware that something strange *was* going on around him. People were running to

and fro, and speaking in loud voices to one another, and seeming to be in great excitement and distress. After a little while his master (not little Harry, but Harry's father) came into the stable-yard with Hector following him, and as soon as Neptune saw him he began to wag his tail, for his master would generally give a kind word to him when he came his way ; but it was evident, after a moment or two, even to dull Neptune, that he was too much absorbed in something to speak to him or any other dog now. He was not even taking the least notice of Hector, who was walking behind him with his tail drooping on the ground, and his anxious eyes upon his master's face ; walking so slowly and sadly that Neptune felt certain *he* knew all about it, whatever it was, and had already settled in his own mind that it was a very bad business indeed ; which distressed Neptune very deeply, for he had a great respect for what Hector thought.

However, Hector's understanding of the matter did not help *him*, for he could not get at Hector to speak to him, and it was quite in vain that he puzzled his old brains to try from anything that was going on to guess what had happened. All he could do was to stand looking about him wistfully ; and when, after a time, everybody had left the yard, and things seemed to be comparatively quiet again, there was no choice for him but to settle down once more upon his straw, and try as usual to doze away the time.

He had hardly, however, been lying quiet for more than ten minutes, when the sound of some fresh voices made him prick up his ears again, and, getting on his feet, he saw a couple of men, one of whom he did not know, come into the stable-yard, and, which was very strange, come straight up to *him*. One of them was a servant of his master ; the other, as he saw with no small alarm, was a tall young man, dressed in a tightly-fitting frock-coat, with a shiny hat, like some people whom Neptune had noticed at times when he took his walk down to the village, and had perceived doing strange things there now and then to disorderly persons, and even, on more than one occasion, to disorderly and wandering dogs ; very strange and alarming sort of men, several dogs of his acquaintance had described them to him as being, and had warned him on all occasions to keep well out of their way,—a piece of advice which Neptune had hitherto most rigidly followed. Here, however, was one of them come to *him*, and the poor old dog's heart began to beat a good deal faster than usual as he got hurriedly upon his legs, and wondered what in the world was going to befall him.

They came straight up to him, the servant speaking as they came.

‘Of course we can try,’ he was saying ; ‘but I suspect we shall make nothing of it, for a stupider old beast than he is I never knew,—though he was fond of Master *Harry* too ; there’s no doubt of that.—Come, Neptune!’

he called out suddenly. 'Neptune! old fellow! wake up and get your wits about you!' And with that he began to clap Neptune on the back so vigorously that the dull old dog, quite amazed at being taken so much notice of, did not know how to caper and yelp and wag his short tail enough to show his appreciation of such an unexpected compliment. He looked very ridiculous, poor stupid old fellow, as he went leaping and frisking about with his stiff awkward body; but the men seemed to be too full of their own thoughts to laugh at him.

All at once the stranger came forward, and taking him by the muzzle turned his head towards him.

'Here, Neptune! here, good dog!' he said, and put something under Neptune's nose, which Neptune for a moment thought was something to eat, and in his excitement had almost gobbled up without pausing to examine it, when luckily, as he was in the very act of snapping at it, he discovered his mistake. Something to eat! No, no. What a stupid fellow he was! Why, it was,—let him smell it one moment!—to be sure it was, a bit of Master Harry's clothes. He gave one sniff at it and knew it quite well. It was Master Harry's little red scarf, and he took it in his mouth softly and tenderly, and then dropped it on the ground and placed his paw upon it, and looked into the men's faces and wagged his tail, and tried hard to say, with his wistful old face, 'Yes, yes, I understand this so far; but what do you want me to do next?'

Well, the men wanted him next to go with them, it appeared, for one of them took up the little scarf again from the ground and began to walk away with it, holding it high in the air and calling Neptune after him, and, perplexed though he was, right glad, of course, was Neptune to follow, and they all three left the stable-yard together ; and leaping and gamboling, and half beside himself with puzzled delight, Neptune scampered by the men's side to the lodge gate, refreshing himself with many a loving sniff at the little scarf, and feeling all in the dark, but quite happy nevertheless,—thinking that perhaps they were taking him to his little master, and that that long-expected ramble in the fields was going to come off at last,—until they passed the lodge and reached the open gates into the road ; and then all at once the two men stood still, and the stranger threw the little scarf once more to Neptune, and then began to urge him forward and to talk to him, and to make all kinds of bewildering signs, not a single one of which could the old dog understand. He stood eagerly looking in the strange man's face, leaping now a few steps to the right hand, now a few steps to the left, wondering so why the man did not go on and lead the way, trying with such dumb, earnest patience to find out what it all meant, desiring so to do what the men required from him, and failing so entirely, in his utter blindness of mind, to guess what in the world it could be.

For several minutes he could not guess it, could not conceive what all this pointing and gesticulating and smelling could be for ; and then suddenly, at last, when he was almost in despair, and when the men, he knew, were nearly out of patience with him, a vague, dim notion of what it meant flashed into his poor old head. They wanted *him* to take them to little Harry ! Was that it ? Was *he* to go and find him out ? Why, if that was all, to be sure he would ! Little Harry would be somewhere about the fields, no doubt ; those happy fields where they had gone once together. He would find him for them in half a dozen minutes. Was that right, masters ? With a joyful bark away he scampered, looking behind him now and then to call the men on. He was by no means quite sure yet that this was what they really wanted from him ; but it was such a great step to have found out what might *possibly* be the thing they wanted that his spirits, which had been sadly depressed for a little while, rose again delightfully as he bounded along the road, and every time he looked back they became still more buoyant, for the quickened steps of the men, and the cheerful words of encouragement that they kept calling out to him, soon made him almost certain that he had actually hit on the right thing to do at last.

So on and on he ran, as fast as his legs would carry him, backwards and forwards (for of course he ran far faster than the men could walk, and so he was

obliged continually to turn round again and retrace his steps that he might even keep them in sight), in a state of prodigious excitement.

‘We shall be with him immediately. Follow me! I know all about it. Just up this lane now, and then turn round to the right,—and a little bit up the hill and there we are!’ he barked out over and over again to the two men behind him; and it seemed to him that they understood every bark he gave, for the farther he went they followed him the faster and faster. So delightful a race Neptune thought that he had never had.

Another minute now and he should be at little Harry’s side! Yes, these were the fields; here was the stile where they went in; now up the little bit of rising ground, and—

He had got to the height whence all the wide field where they once had played together could be seen; but the field was empty; there was no Harry there. He looked all round; no, not a creature there; nothing but the bright summer sunshine lying on the green grass.

He stood stock-still and gave a great sorrowful bark, then turned about and looked in the men’s faces, who were following close behind, thinking that perhaps *they* would know what to do now; but, alas! they knew nothing; he saw that in a moment: he must find little Harry without any help from them. But how in the world was he to find him? He was a stupid old dog,

you know, and all that it came into his head to do at first was to run headlong round and round the field, barking with all his might, and poking his nose into every sort of unlikely place, on the bare chance of little Harry being hid in one of them. But of course he was not; and then, when far or wide he could not see a sign of him, and when, coming slowly back to the men, he saw them standing still and looking as if they did not know which way to turn, then at last a feeling of dread and terror crept into the dog's heart, and the whole truth at length began to dawn upon him that little Harry's whereabouts was not only unknown to these particular persons who wanted him, but that everybody was looking for little Harry, and that he was lost. Neptune had heard stories of such things before now; he had heard of little children straying away and losing themselves in woods, or being stolen by naughty men and women, and how whole parties of people would go out to look for them, and would search and search for days, and sometimes never find them, or find them only when they were dying with hunger and cold. Such things had often happened, he had been told: oh, little Master Harry, dear little Master, was it going to happen to you?

What could old Neptune do? He had been round and round the field, and it was quite clear that Harry was not there; where could he look for him next? He looked up wistfully into the men's faces for some

instruction or advice, but they had none to give him. They had plainly lost all the little confidence they had ever had in him, and were talking together without paying heed to him any more. Should he run round the field once again, just for a last chance? Not much use in doing it, he knew; yet he could do nothing else that he could think off, so off he set. A slow trot all round, snuffing the ground as he went, poking his head through every opening in the hedge—but all in vain; until the circuit was nearly made, when suddenly the men, who were walking away back to the stile by which they had entered the field, heard a sharp bark, and, turning round at the sound of it, there was Neptune with his ears erect and his back legs stretched stiffly out behind him, snuffing and joyfully barking at something before him, with all his might. They whistled to him to come to them, but their whistling only made him turn his head round for a moment; so then they went to him; and when they came quite close they saw that he had got his paws over a little crumpled soiled child's glove. A single solitary glove, and nothing more; but as soon as the men caught sight of it they got almost as much excited as Neptune was himself.

'He must have been here, that's certain!' they exclaimed. 'The dog would never take any notice of it if this wasn't the little fellow's glove. Bravo, Neptune! on with you, old dog! Yes, through the hedge;

here's a gap ; he's as likely to have gone this way as any other.' Neptune was through the hedge already ; and away, full speed, the men went after him.

And then such a race began ! I am afraid, if the truth must be told, that Neptune knew very little indeed where he was going ; his scent (if indeed in this case there was any scent to follow) was not of the keenest, and his wit at no time was of the brightest ; but he had to find little Harry ; that one fact he had at last got fairly fixed in his cloudy old brain, and he knew that he must go on looking for him as long as he had a leg to stand on.

So away he went, scouring the country right and left,—now for a couple of minutes dashing off in one direction, now taking a fresh course and going like an arrow right ahead, now doubling, and coming pelting back again headlong, all without the slightest plan,—and alas ! without the slightest result either. There was no little Harry far or wide to be seen ; not even so much as another glove of little Harry's.

They had been out now for a long time ; old Neptune did not know how long it was, but the two men did, and were beginning to get very tired, and rather out of temper. Of course, too, they saw quite well that, though Neptune might be lucky enough to hit upon a discovery by chance, he was far too stupid a dog really to know at all where he was taking them, and they felt that they had probably all this time

been going on a very wild-goose chase. So at last they said to one another that as the evening was so warm they thought they had better take a rest now, and try and find some place where they could get a draught of beer, and they whistled to Neptune and took their way to a little roadside inn which was not far off, where they called for what they wanted, and sat down at a little table before the door to drink it.

Their walk had been a rough one, and, as you may suppose, their boots bore marks of it, for they were all covered with mud and clay.

‘You seem to have had a pretty good tramp of it to-day,’ the landlord said to them, as he stood lounging at the door smoking his pipe.

‘I’ll warrant you we have!’ they answered; and they began to tell him what they had been about.

Before they had finished their story the landlord was standing quite erect, and had taken the pipe from his mouth.

‘What kind of a little lad was he?’ he asked. ‘Had he a sort of a tartan petticoat on him, and a cock’s feather, or something that way, in his cap?’

‘To be sure he had!’ cried the men, and they started to their feet.

‘Then I’ll wager that he’s a little chap I saw not above an hour ago!’ said the landlord. And then he told them how, coming home from market across the country a while before, he had seen a little fellow in the com-

pany of a man and woman who seemed to be scolding him, and taking him along with them against his will. 'They were a rough-looking pair,' he said, 'and I had my misgivings at the time that they were up to some mischief; but the business was none of mine, so I kept a quiet tongue in my head. However, if the little boy was the one you're looking for, you'll have a good chance of coming up with him still, for they were getting along slow enough with him. I'll tell you now where I saw them.' And then he gave them the best directions that he could as to the road they were to take; and in another minute, full of hope, the men had started once more, with Neptune (who was sure from their manner that *something* had been heard of little Harry at last, though of course he could not guess what it was) joyfully following at their heels.

Away they went—off the highroad again, straight across the fields, wasting no time now in looking either to the right hand or the left. There was a clump of trees far ahead on a rising ground that they had to make for first. Well, they got to these after a brisk walk. Then they followed a footpath down into a little wood, and then they went through the wood, and on the farther side of it crossed another field. And then the question came—what should they do next? for it was just at this point that the landlord had caught his last sight of the child. There was a lane turning from the field on one side, and a path

running across the field on the other, and who could tell which of these two they ought to take?

Certainly neither of the *men* could. But *Neptune*, for some reason or other, very decidedly preferred the lane to the field path, and while the men stood hesitating, away he trotted down it; and the two men, glad to be guided by anything, whether beast or fellow-creature, turned their backs also upon the field, and followed where Neptune led.

But alas for the weary feet that plunged on through miry lanes, and plodded along vainly on their fruitless search! The summer day had been a couple of hours from ending when they left the inn, but when the sun had set and the twilight had come on they were still as much at sea as they had ever been. The men had lost their way, and had got tired and spiritless; trusting to Neptune's guidance, they had been making a great circuit, and had just found themselves again at a point which they had left an hour ago; it was getting dark, and they were footsore and hungry. What more could they do? As for continuing the search after nightfall, that was out of the question; besides, some of the other parties that were out might have been more lucky than themselves, and by this time the boy might have been found; they had better make their way home again, they decided, and learn there how matters stood. So they turned them about, and whistled to the dog to follow them.

But little did they know of Neptune's nature, and of his patient, brave, enduring, loving heart. He stood still for a moment when they called him, and turned and looked up in their faces. 'What—go home, and give up looking for little Harry!' his look said, and then he gave a great wild bark, and bounded away—fast, out of their sight, lest they should try to get at him and hold him—away like the wind again over hill and dale. For what did *he* care though his unaccustomed legs were stiff with running, and his tongue was swollen and dry, and his eyes bloodshot? He only knew that little Harry was lost, and that, let who would go home, for *him* there was no going home again till he had thrust his black old muzzle once more into his little master's hand—till his old eyes had looked once more in little Harry's face.

So he ran on still in his wild way—here and there, backwards and forwards, searching in every impossible hole and corner, like the stupid old dog he was, as though Harry had been a rabbit or a rat instead of a little lad of six years old (but it was better to make sure, Neptune thought patiently, for this was such a strange world that there was no saying *where* little Harry might not be hid); and, ashamed to go home without him, the men still unwillingly followed behind.

But the end was near at hand now. A few minutes longer,—and then suddenly, as Neptune was a little way ahead, all at once they heard an eager yelping

sound, a hurried crackling of the brushwood in the nearest hedge, and then a loud wild joyous bark.

‘He’s found him!’ the men cried, and started forward as if they had not walked a step that day.

And so he had. The long day’s search at last was ended. The old dog’s happy eyes had looked once more on the little master that he loved. There he was, crouching at the bottom of that steep bank.

‘Little Master, I have found you!’ he cried out, in his doggish tongue. And with that joyful greeting on his faithful lips he fell bleeding on the ground; for, as he leapt the bank, the man who had stolen little Harry turned sharply round, and, with a gun that was in his hand, shot the old dog through the back.

‘Oh, Cousin Trix!’ exclaimed little Mabel, and burst out crying.

‘Are you sorry for old Neptune?’ said Cousin Trix. ‘Well, little Harry, I can tell you, was sorry too.’

He broke away from the woman who was trying to hold him, and threw himself upon the ground, sobbing, by his side. ‘Oh, Neptune, my old Neptune, my dear old Neptune!’ he cried out, and he threw his arms about the dog’s neck, and sobbed aloud, and pressed his curly head against the poor old heart. I don’t think they two thought of anything but one another for a whole minute or more, even though the other four



NEPTUNE FINDS HARRY. —PAGE 32.

people were all fighting at their backs in a way that would have made anybody frightened ; for the man who had shot Neptune was a poacher, and when Harry's servant and the policeman came up he fought like a wild beast, and he was so strong, and the woman did so much to help him, that after a sharp struggle they were glad to let them both escape, and quite content merely to have rescued little Harry out of their hands, for they did not do even that without a hard fight for it. However, it was all over in the course of a minute, and then they had time to breathe, and think of the poor old dog.

He was lying quite still all this time, with his eyes open, but not able to move a bit, except just to give a very little wag to the end of his short tail now and then, as if to say that nobody need be sorry for him, for that he knew it was all quite right ; and now and then he put out his tongue, and gave a feeble grateful lick or two to little Harry's hands.

And now they began to think what they were to do with him, and how they were to get him and Harry home, for though he had been nothing all his life but a stupid dull old dog, and though both the men believed that he was dying, I don't think either of them would have left him there to die alone, poor men as they were, if you had offered them five pounds. So one of them took off his coat, and, lifting the poor old fellow on it (which, however, was a hard business to do, tenderly

though they tried to touch him), they took him up and carried him between them, as in a hammock ; and in this way, with sobbing little Harry by their side, they got back to the high-road once more, and in a few minutes after that to a house by the roadside, where the people willingly took them in, and let poor wounded Neptune lie down on the hearth, while one of the men went on as fast as he could run to carry the glad news home.

How they met him there, and how they received his tidings, you may fancy for yourselves, Children. In half an hour after they had been told them little Harry's father had leaped down from horse-back at the cottage door, and had got his little son clasped close in his arms. And then, with Harry's hand in his, he went down on his knees by Neptune's side on the cottage floor. 'My brave old dog! My faithful, loving, noble dog!' he said, and burst into tears over the old shaggy head that with all its love could not lift itself now in answer to one kind word.

'But, Cousin Trix, he wasn't really dying, was he?' cried Jack, in a tone of some excitement.

And Cousin Trix paused for a moment, and then gave a little smile, and said—

They thought at first that his back was quite broken, and that he certainly couldn't live, but Harry's father

had the first dog-doctor that was to be found in all the country brought to him, and he examined him carefully, and found where the bullet had lodged, and took it out ; and then declared that, for all that had happened yet, old Neptune might live, and get upon his legs again.

And so he did. He never afterwards perhaps was quite as strong as he had been before he was shot, but still, upon the whole, he recovered quite as well as could have been expected ; and after he had been carefully nursed for a long time, and after everybody had been very kind to him, at last one day he went quietly back to his kennel in the stable-yard.

‘ Back to the stable,—after what he had done ! Oh, Cousin Trix ! ’ cried several of the children together, quite indignantly.

‘ Well, children, what would you have had ? ’ asked Cousin Trix. ‘ He wasn’t a drawing-room dog, you know ; he wasn’t even a dog fit to have with you in the garden, for, try as they would, nobody could ever teach him the difference between the flower-beds and the walks, and he would do more harm in half an hour than the gardener could repair in a couple of days. No ; the stable-yard was his proper place, and to the stable-yard he went back when his nursing was ended, and fell once more quite quietly into his old life. Only, I think, it was a happier life than he had ever led before, for everybody, from this time onward, was very kind to the old

dull awkward dog, and kindest of all were his master and little Harry. There never was a day after his illness that Harry did not come to see him, and many a brave scamper in the fields did he get with the companion that he loved so well. What it all meant, and why people should take more notice of him now than they had done in former days, he never rightly understood to the end of his life; it was to him one of the many mysteries of the world,—but a happy mystery, over which he would brood in grateful dreamy content as he dozed away many a sunny afternoon on the cool stones of the stable-yard.

‘And so he lived for two or three more years, until he had reached a green old age, and his loving eyes grew dim; but even then,—when he was too deaf to hear when other voices called, and too blind to notice other faces near him,—he knew Harry’s face and Harry’s voice, and would joyfully rouse himself to answer a single stroke of the hand that might be given him, or a single kind word that might be spoken to him by the young master whom he had loved from first to last more than his own life.’

‘Cousin Trix,’ said one of the children next afternoon, ‘do you ever tell fairy stories?’

Cousin Trix had good-naturedly come up to the

schoolroom again to-day, to play with the ill-used little creatures there in the twilight, and one of them put this question to her before she had been many minutes in the room. It had very much the air of having been arranged amongst them beforehand, for as soon as Daisy (it was Daisy who acted as spokeswoman) began to open her lips, all the other three stood still with their eyes intent on Cousin Trix's face.

'I daresay I have told fairy stories in my day, Daisy,' replied Cousin Trix. 'Why do you ask?' And she looked at Daisy so innocently, that Daisy was quite taken in, and really believed that Cousin Trix couldn't guess what she had in her mind.

So then she began rather a roundabout explanation, to the effect that she was very fond of fairy stories, and so was Mabel, and so, she thought, was Roger; and Jack *used* to be fond of them a year or two ago, and she dared say that in reality he was yet; and that they hadn't had a new book of fairy tales for ever so long, and were quite tired of the old ones—which, indeed, were almost torn to tatters, too, they had been read so very much;—and so (here Daisy began at last to come to the kernel of the business) if Cousin Trix was really in the habit of telling fairy stories, and thought that she could do it pretty well, Daisy would be very well pleased, and so would Queen Mab, and Roger, and even Hercules, if she would sit down and begin to tell one now.

‘Very well, Daisy,’ responded Cousin Trix, who had had full time during Daisy’s prosy speech to get her ideas in order ; and, dropping into a seat, she instantly began—

‘There was once a little girl—’

‘Oh, stop a moment, Cousin Trix !’ shouted both the boys, and Daisy looked quite confounded at this rapid fulfilment of her request, and at the precipitate way in which Cousin Trix was proceeding.

‘Wait till we sit down !’ ‘How can you do things so quickly ?’ ‘One would think you went about with stories on the tip of your tongue !’ cried the several children loudly.

‘And why *shouldn’t* I go about with stories on the tip of my tongue ?’ inquired Cousin Trix quite coolly.

But at this the children stared, and made no answer ; so Cousin Trix laughed, and seeing that they were now all seated, she once more began her tale.





DOWN AMONGST THE FAIRIES.

PART I.

THERE was a little girl once, [said Cousin Trix,] long ago, in the dark ages, whose name was Effie. She was about Daisy's age; and in personal appearance she was rather like Daisy too.

At this all the other children instantly turned their gaze upon Daisy, in order to form a vivid conception at once of what Effie was like; and Daisy drew herself up and looked rather complacent.

Like Daisy also, she had some good qualities, and not a few bad ones.

Here Daisy's lip fell, and she didn't appear quite so well satisfied as she had done a moment before.

‘Cousin Trix,’ said Mabel rather anxiously, ‘it isn’t really going to be a story about Daisy, is it?’

‘A story about Daisy, my dear! No, certainly not,’ replied Cousin Trix, in a tone of the most innocent amazement. ‘What in the world do you think there is in Daisy that I could make a story about?’

At which the two boys laughed, and though kind little Mabel said that she was glad, Daisy herself, for her part, did not feel so very sure that *she* was particularly pleased. However, as she was a little doubtful about it, she wisely held her tongue, and let Cousin Trix proceed.

She was very good-tempered and frank and honest, [said Cousin Trix,] and as nice and affectionate a little thing to have to do with, when you merely wanted to be idle or to play, as any one would desire; but when you *didn’t* want to play, she was the very idlest little monkey you ever came across. Daisy was nothing to her there! I have never certainly in Daisy seen any signs to lead me to fear that she is undermining her health by hard work or excessive study; [here the boys began to grin again, in what seemed to Daisy, who looked dignified, a most uncalled-for way;] but, compared with Effie, Daisy is a perfect model of industry. There never, I think, was anybody before Effie’s time so hopelessly idle as she was. By the time she was eight years old, she didn’t know four letters in the

whole alphabet, and as for using her needle, she could hardly have done so much as a bit of plain hemming to save her life. Her mother had had ten governesses for her in succession, but it was all no use ; there was nothing in the world that Effie would learn.

So at last, when her eighth birthday came, and there was not the slightest sign of improvement in her, her father and mother saw quite clearly that the only thing that could be done with her was to give her over to the fairies ; and, accordingly, they dismissed her last governess, and with a heavy heart the poor mother went away one afternoon, and settled the whole business.

‘And how in the world did she do it, Cousin Trix ?’ asked Roger sharply, thinking to trip Cousin Trix up.

‘She went and called upon the fairies, as any other lady would do,’ replied Cousin Trix instantly, as pat as possible.

‘And how did she know where to find them ?’ demanded Roger, still incredulous, and hoping to have better luck a second time.

‘My dear,’ said Cousin Trix gravely, ‘in the dark ages people knew all about the fairies, and were often quite as much at home with them as I am with you. Effie’s mother hadn’t the least difficulty in the matter. She just set off in a coach and six, and drove to the gate of fairy-land.

She knocked at the door, and almost instantly two

or three of the fairies peeped out and saw her, and then at once came forward in the civilest way, to inquire after her health, and find out what she wanted. For Effie's mother was a very fine lady, I must tell you, and very rich, and the fairies always liked to keep on good terms with people of that kind. So three staid and dignified fairies came out to speak to her, and to them the poor mother told all her trouble ; and as soon as she had told it the three fairies all began to grin and chuckle in the most surprising way.

'Ah, you 'll never make anything of her—that's as clear as daylight!' said the first fairy, nodding her head and looking as cheery as if she were saying something quite delightful.

'Oh no, quite useless to think of *you* making anything of her,' cried the second fairy, as if the very idea was quite laughable. 'Fairy-land is the place for her. Send her to *us*, my lady!' And the second fairy looked so happy that it was really pleasant to see her.

'Yes, yes, send her to *us*. We 'll make her learn, I 'll warrant you!' cried the third fairy, and laughed and rubbed her hands with glee.

So, finding them all so charmingly of one mind, the poor mother could only sigh, and answer meekly that she had no doubt she had better take their advice.

Though it will be a terrible pain for me to part with her,' she said, 'and if it wasn't for her good—'

'But it *is* for her good!' chimed all the three fairies

together, and fell to nodding their heads and chuckling again as if the arrangement was one that to all parties concerned must be equally delightful. And, indeed, to *them* it was very delightful indeed, for there was nothing that the fairies ever liked so much as to get a human child into their possession. Whether she was good or bad was a matter of almost pure indifference to them. So that she was human they were satisfied. It was a curious taste ; but tastes are so often unaccountable ! As the three little fairies talked to Effie's mother, you would hardly believe how all their finger-ends were itching with desire to get at Effie, and their very mouths watering at the thought of the treat that was in prospect for them.

‘But it *is* for her good!’ cried all the fairies in a breath. And the mother answered sadly—‘Well, I suppose it is’—and could hardly keep the tears out of her eyes.

‘And the sooner she comes the better, my lady,’ said the first fairy eagerly.

‘Ah, the only pity is that so much time has been lost already,’ said the second fairy, regretfully shaking her head.

‘We must do our best at any rate to make up for it now,’ said the third fairy, with decision.

‘But I *couldn't* part with her for a day or two. Oh, let me keep her for two days more!’ cried the poor mother.

Well, the fairies thought it a very great pity, they said ; these things, when they had to be done, were so much better done at once. Human beings, however, were so silly, that unless they were humoured a little now and then, the fairies knew, there would be no getting anything out of them ; so, after pouting a good deal, and feeling that they were really being very ill-used, they agreed to let Effie remain at home until twelve o'clock of the following night.

‘But mind, not a single hour longer than that,’ said the eldest fairy, knitting her brows and looking very severe ; for fairies, you know, are most imperious little people, and when you put yourselves in their hands you must be prepared to get very little of your own will afterwards ; and the lady said meekly, that she thanked them very much, and that it shouldn’t be even a *moment* longer.

And then she made as if she were about to take her leave, and, she and the fairies having exchanged many polite compliments, she was apparently on the very point of stepping back to her carriage, when all at once, just as if she had only that moment thought of it,—though the truth was she had scarcely thought of anything else all through the interview—the poor soul turned suddenly round, and said quite carelessly—

‘Oh, by the way, it would be as well to settle something about the time she is to stay with you. I suppose,

now, a year would be about long enough?' And she gave a look into their faces that might have melted anybody's heart.

But fairies, you know, haven't *got* hearts, but only a hollow place in their bosoms where their hearts ought to be, so of course the lady's pathetic look didn't move these little creatures in the least, and all they had to do was to reply to her *words*, which they did pretty sharply.

'A year! Well, you human beings are the most unreasonable people I ever had to do with!' the first fairy exclaimed, looking as if the absurdity of the world really pained her.

'I never heard such a proposal in my life; you might as well say a month!' cried the second fairy, so indignant that she was quite blue in the face.

'We *never* receive any one for a shorter period than seven years,' said the third fairy severely.

And then the poor mother gave a little cry,—though indeed she was more than half prepared for this from the very first.

'And shall I never see her for seven long years?' she cried; 'oh, my little Effie!' and the tears ran down her cheeks.

But the fairies said, No, most decidedly she could not see her for seven years. If she wanted her back at the end of that time she could come and take her, but as for their receiving her for any shorter period it was a

thing that was never done, and was against all the rules of fairy-land.

So the poor mother could only sigh again most deeply and heavily, and go her way. As for drawing back, that wasn't to be thought of; the fairies allow no drawing back when you make bargains with *them*. And, besides, what better could the mother do?

As you may imagine, it was a sorrowful day and a half that followed. Effie, indeed, was happy enough, for she knew nothing of what was before her, and, in the circumstances, her mother very naturally let her do whatever she liked, so that she had a fine time of it, and played to her heart's content from morning to night; but the poor father and mother were very sorrowful, and as the time came nearer and nearer for Effie to go they got more and more sad, till at length on the second evening, when they said good-night to her for the last time, their hearts ached as if they were going to break. But it was no use to repent now, and think that they would have liked to make one final attempt more at home to cure Effie of her idle ways; what was done was beyond recall. So they kissed their little girl again and again, and then she went to bed; and they never saw her any more, for the fairies came when she was fast asleep and carried her away to fairy-land.

Not an idea had she of what was going on, poor little thing, and when she awoke next morning you can fancy what a state of bewilderment she was in. She had

gone to sleep comfortably tucked up in her cot in a neat little room twelve feet square, and when she awoke she was lying on a bank strewn over with rose-leaves (fairies have such curious habits, you know, and always, I believe, use rose-leaves where we use blankets and sheets), with a river running at her feet, of which the water looked like molten silver, and great trees over her head, with their leaves all of gold, and such a brightness in the air, and such sweet sounds of wonderful music floating round her as little Effie had certainly never seen or heard before in all her life.

Of course she sat up, and rubbed her eyes, and began to stare with all her might. She was not a timid child, so she didn't feel particularly frightened at first, but the longer she stared the more amazed she grew; and when, after she had been looking all about her, round and round, for several minutes, at last the sweetest sound reached her ears, as of a peal of silver bells, and all at once a score or more of fairies upon horseback came into view, then certainly Effie's heart came almost into her mouth, and whether to cry out and let them all see her, or to throw herself down upon the ground again, and try to hide herself beneath the rose-leaves, in her amazement and alarm she couldn't tell. Of course she knew at once that the wonderful little creatures coming towards her were a troop of fairies (people in old times always knew fairies instantly when they saw them, and, indeed, as they are

invariably, you know, just a foot, or at the most thirteen inches high, it isn't on the whole much to be wondered at); they were fairies, Effie knew well enough, but how could she tell merely by the look of them whether they were good fairies or bad?

Good or bad, however, it mattered very little as far as the question of how Effie was to conduct herself was concerned. Two or three moments were enough to show her that that was an affair in which she had no voice at all. She might pile the rose-leaves over herself if she liked, but as to *that* hiding her from the fairies—! Why, they had seen her in an instant; they knew all about her being there even before they saw her, and such a clatter of little voices began immediately to make the air alive all round her that it was worse than the buzzing of a whole hive of bees; and not only did the fairies chatter, but they jumped down from their horses, and they skipped about upon the grass, and they leaped and danced round Effie, and altogether behaved in such a scatterbrained way, that it was enough to make anybody's head go round.

Effie was dreadfully bewildered for a few moments, but after a very little while she rather began to like it, for they were evidently a most merry little crew; and of all things in this world Effie loved merriment. It was quite clear too from the tone of their remarks that they meant to be friendly with her.

'Ha, ha! so you've come to live in fairy-land!' they

chirped. 'I hope you like it, my dear! We're practising our steps, you see. We're the Queen's Maids of Honour and her Lords in Waiting, and we have to dance attendance on her.'

'Come and play with us! Come and play with us! Come and play with us!' the whole bevy of them began to squeak at last, leaping, and holding out their hands to Effie; and indeed so eager were they in their invitation, that while they shouted it out two or three of the Lords in Waiting fairly went head over heels three or four times in succession, just, to all appearance, out of pure light-heartedness and delight.

So, upon this, Effie burst out laughing, and, able to resist no longer, skipped forward and began to dance too as merrily as the rest, and for ten minutes or more, I can tell you, they had a lively time of it. How much longer, also, they might have danced it is hard to say, for the fun was still going on fast and furious, when on a sudden a little sound caught the fairies' ears that *they* understood well enough, though Effie did not, and in an instant, before she could conceive what had come over them, the whole troop turned tail, and, screaming with impish laughter, scampered from the place. A few of them scrambled up again on their horses' backs, and galloped off in that way, but the greater number scuttled away on their own feet as fast as those tiny members would carry them (and it was wonderful how fast that was), and in about a dozen seconds not a creature was

left in sight but poor little Effie, stopped suddenly in the middle of her wild dance, and standing all alone, bewildered and dazed.

She was not, however, left alone very long. The sharp little imps had known right well that somebody was coming when they raced off in that headlong manner, and only a few moments had elapsed after their departure when three more fairies came bustling forward, quite of another sort from those wild monkeys who had just departed ; the same three, in fact, who had talked with Effie's mother, and settled all about poor Effie's coming.

They came forward gravely enough, I can tell you, not to say grimly, for all the grass was trodden down round the spot where she was standing, and they were too well aware of the kind of pranks that were constantly being played in fairy-land not to understand at a glance what had been going on. They looked grim, and even sour, as they stepped up in a business-like way, with all their six eyes fixed on Effie's face.

'Good-morning to you ! Humph ! You've been dancing !' said the first fairy curtly.

'Dancing isn't allowed at this hour of the day. You'll have to learn that, my young lady,' said the second fairy sharply.

'And a good many other things too : a good many other things too, my dear,' said the third fairy, and began to chuckle so unpleasantly that she quite made Effie's blood run cold.

For the first time, a feeling that was almost terror came over the little girl. She looked into the three fairies' faces, and shivered when she saw their six cold eyes upon her.

'I want to go home!' she called out suddenly. 'I don't know how I came here. Oh, let me go home!'

On this the three fairies fell to laughing, as if the sight of Effie's distress was one of the most curious and amusing things they had ever seen; and indeed so delighted were they with it that it entirely restored their good humour (which had been evidently pretty severely ruffled at first), so that after a few moments they began to address Effie in quite a changed and pleasant tone.

'Don't you trouble yourself about getting home, my dear,' said the eldest fairy. 'Your mother has sent you here, and you're going to live with us in fairy-land, and a very nice place you'll find it.'

'But I *can't* live here; I want to go home; I want my mother!' cried poor little Effie passionately.

And then the fairies laughed again till they fairly cried.

'Oh, how funny you mortals are!' said the second fairy, wiping her eyes. 'Won't I do instead of your mother? Oh, dear me!' And the second fairy laughed so that she quite gave herself a pain in her side.

'We'll *all* be mothers to you, my dear. Will that satisfy you?' asked the third fairy, as soon as she could speak for amusement; and when for poor Effie's only

answer there came a great sob and a flood of bitter tears, you would have thought that the three little fairies would really have done themselves a mischief, for they screamed with laughter until they almost choked.

However, there was real business to be done, and these fairies were very fond of business, and were always bustling about and arranging and deciding matters in fairy-land very nearly from morning to night ; so when their amusement had fairly exhausted them they began to look grave again, and to turn their attention to the work in hand. Something, of course, must be given Effie to do forthwith. Effie had come to fairy-land on purpose to be cured of her idleness, and I promise you the three fairies intended it to be no fault of theirs if she wasn't cured in a pretty short space of time, for the setting of tasks was a sort of work that these fairies found perfectly delightful ; they could have gone on doing it and never have tired the whole day long. Hard tasks that could barely be accomplished, or that actually couldn't be accomplished at all,—these were the kind they loved best, and whenever they got a chance of imposing them on anybody, fairy or mortal, it made quite a brightness in their lives that refreshed them for days and days.

Well, they soon settled what they should set Effie to do. They wouldn't give her what was the least difficult at first, they said sweetly ; she should have something to-day that was quite easy and pleasant. So the eldest

of the fairies told her to come along with her (and poor Effie did so meekly and sadly, for as for opposing the fairies when she found they wouldn't listen to her prayers, she knew too well what fairies were, to dream of doing anything so wild as that ; and besides, if Effie's own dear mother had really given her up, what could Effie do but try and bear it ?) and the fairy took her a little way, to where a beautiful shrub was growing, all covered over with crimson flowers. Here she stood still, and, looking at Effie quite pleasantly—

‘All you will have to do this morning, my dear,’ she said, ‘will be to count the leaves upon this pretty tree. It's a piece of work scarcely worth mentioning—such a mere trifle ; but on that very account I wish you to set about it without any delay, that it may be completed in a couple of hours at farthest. Take the utmost care not to break off any of the leaves or blossoms, and don't come nearer the plant than is absolutely necessary. But above all, see that you count correctly. Now begin, and lose no time.’

And with that the fairy nodded and smiled good-humouredly, and in another moment she was gone, and Effie was left alone.

It was a strange thing to give her to do, the child thought to herself,—a sort of thing that was as much play as work, it seemed to her ; and what the fairy could possibly want to know the number of leaves upon a whole shrub for, was more than Effie could conceive.

However, as it was so like playing, she had no particular objection to count them, and to count she accordingly began with a pretty good grace.

But, alas for poor little Effie's hopes of a quickly done and easy task! She hadn't been at work for a quarter of an hour when she was getting all hot with impatience at her inability to make anything whatever of her work. For the first minute or two it had all been easy enough. She began at the top of the bush, and got hold of a nice leafy branch, and counted away, 'one, two, three,' quite glibly and at her ease. But by the time she had told off about fifty leaves it suddenly struck her that she had passed over a certain little spray. Had she passed it over or not? She paused to consider, and while she considered, she first forgot the number she had reached to, and then she forgot the place on the branch where she had stopped. 'Oh, how stupid of me!' she cried, vexed and disappointed. 'Now I must begin over again.' And with a sigh she recommenced her work.

But again, and again, and again the same thing happened. Sometimes, indeed, she got a little further on than she had done at first; once she had even counted up to near three hundred, but sooner or later some accident always happened; she forgot what she had counted and what she hadn't, and got confused, and lost her place, and had once more, and again and again once more, to begin afresh.

Dispiriting work, I can tell you, poor little Effie found it. If it had not been that she knew well what powerful creatures the fairies were, she never would have gone on trying to do it half so long as she did ; but at last, when she had broken down for about the twentieth time, even her dread of the fairies failed to sustain her patience any longer, and, bursting into tears, she threw herself down on the grass at the foot of the tree, and declared that she neither could nor would go on counting any more.

So she sat on the grass sobbing, and thinking of her mother and the pleasant days at home, till the long two hours came to an end, when, true to her time, the fairy returned, and professed to be mightily astonished to see her in such a strange state of distress.

‘Hey-day! what’s the matter here?’ she exclaimed sharply.

And then poor little Effie got up sadly, and told her that for the life of her she couldn’t count the leaves.

‘Not count the leaves, you little goose!’ cried the fairy. ‘What in the world is the good of you if you can’t even so much as count leaves? Look at *me*!’ And, stepping to the bush, the fairy leapt up amongst the branches, and certainly began to count the leaves at a most amazing rate. Whether she really counted them all or not it was indeed impossible for Effie to say, but undoubtedly she ran up the hundreds so fast that even to listen to her was a thing to take away your breath,

and at the end of ten minutes down she jumped lightly again upon the ground, and triumphantly declared that on the tree, from top to bottom, there were exactly six thousand and forty-nine leaves,—neither more nor less.’

‘And this is what you have the face to tell me you have found it impossible to do in the course of two whole hours!’ said the fairy indignantly.

And, to tell the truth, Effie felt miserably ashamed of herself, and quite humbled to the earth.

‘I am sure I did try to do it. I am very sorry I was so stupid,’ she said sadly. ‘I hope I shall do the next thing you set me better.’

‘I’m sure I hope so too,’ answered the fairy dryly. ‘But come—it’s no use crying about it. As this is your first day I’ll pass the matter over. It will be my sister’s turn, however, to set you your task to-morrow, and I warrant you you’ll find *her* a stiffer kind of customer to deal with. Now, then, if you like, you may go and play; but mind you keep out of mischief,’ said the fairy sternly.

And away she went, and left Effie to amuse and console herself as she best could.

For a little while Effie was sad enough. That parting remark of the fairy’s about what would probably happen to her on the morrow had made a cold feeling creep down her back, and she was full of sorrow too at having lost her father and mother, and at being left all alone here in this unknown fairy-land; but after a little while, as she went wandering on in the glowing

golden light, with everything about her looking so strange and beautiful and new, she presently began to take heart again, and to think that perhaps, after all, it wouldn't be so very hard to live for a time in fairy-land, with those wild madcap elves for playfellows, and all these pretty trees, and flowers, and emerald grass, and silver rivers, round about her. If only she could get out of the way of the three severe fairies who had to set her tasks to her! But even while she said so she gave a deep sigh, for she had little enough hope of the possibility of that.

'However,' thought Effie to herself, 'there will be no more work to-day, so at any rate I'll try for the present to enjoy myself.' And accordingly she plucked up her spirits as well as she could, and before very long had nearly for the moment forgotten her troubles, and was going on her way blithely enough.

She was in high hopes that she might fall in again before long somewhere or other with her merry friends of the morning, so she kept a sharp look-out for them, right and left, and listened with all her ears to try and catch the sound of their chattering little voices or of their horses' silver bells. Neither voices nor bells, however, were to be heard anywhere, and she was beginning to get rather tired of being so long alone, when all at once her eyes lighted upon such an unexpected sight that every thought of the fairies in an instant vanished from her mind. 'Oh, if there were only some other

children here how nice it would be!' she had just exclaimed to herself, when hardly had the words crossed her lips before what should she see, not fifty yards away from her, but the very thing that she desired,—not children, indeed, in the plural, but at any rate a single child—a real living human child, sitting and sewing by the river's edge.

'Oh!!' cried Effie, at this unlooked-for sight, and sprang forward with such eagerness that in half-a-dozen seconds she was at the little girl's side. 'Oh, I am so glad! Where have you come from? How long have you been here? Who are you?' cried Effie, throwing her arms about her, and quite breathless with delight.

But the child shrank back a little, and lifted up her eyes with a strange unsurprised look.

'I've been here a long time—I don't know how long,' she said slowly. 'Oh yes, a long long time!' she said, and turned again to her work, and quietly went on sewing.

Poor Effie stared, and fell a step back. The child spoke so strangely that she felt half frightened.

'But why have you been here so long? I don't understand. Can't you get away?' she said in quite an altered tone.

'No, no,' the child answered quietly.

She didn't seem in the least amazed at seeing Effie, or as if she at all wanted to talk to her, or look at her, or have anything to do with her. She spoke quite

quietly, but in such a strange, dull, weary way, that Effie thought it was like somebody speaking in her sleep. She didn't even raise her head a second time, but went on sewing busily. She was making wonderful little fairy garments out of a piece of silver gossamer,—making them so daintily and so wonderfully quickly.

Effie stood looking at her in a kind of frightened amazement. *Was* she a human child or not? she thought.

'I have four-and-twenty more of them to make,' the child said, just in the same slow tired way, when Effie had stood silently staring at her for a minute or more; 'and it will be hard work to get them done. They must all be finished, you know, for the dance to-night.'

'But how *can* you make four-and-twenty dresses before night?' cried Effie, quite aghast.

'Oh! I have often as much as that to do,' said the child quietly. 'I made forty dresses the other day. One gets used to doing things very quickly here. But don't talk to me, please,' she said, all in the same weary, sorrowful way. 'You had better go somewhere else if you want to talk.'

'But I don't want to go anywhere else. I want to stay with you. I'm afraid of the fairies!' poor Effie cried.

'Ah yes! I suppose you are. I think I was afraid of them once too,' said the child dreamily. 'Well, if

you want to stay, you had better sit down, for it disturbs me to have you standing there.'

And then Effie sat down a pace or two off on the grass, and the strange child sewed away with all her might, so fast that you could sometimes scarcely see her fingers moving. One little dress after another she made, and never a word more for ever so long did either of the children speak ; until at last Effie ventured to stretch out her hand that she might take up one of the little frocks to look at it, and then the child glanced hurriedly round.

'You mustn't touch them—they won't bear to be touched,' she said quickly. 'Look at the mischief you have done already!'

And indeed, Effie had no sooner laid her fingers on the garment that was nearest to her, than she found she might as well try to take up a spider's web. She had but put her hand upon it, yet she left a great rent in the little skirt.

'Oh, I am so sorry!' she exclaimed, and started back.

'It's no use being sorry now. You shouldn't be so careless when I have so much to do. Now, I shall have to make this one over again,' the child said reproachfully.

'But how is it possible for you to work at them, when I can't even touch them without tearing them to pieces?' Effie asked, with widely opened eyes.

'Oh, we learn to do many things here,' answered the child quietly. 'I was like you once. But I have been making these frocks now for so many many years.'

'And shall *I* have to make them too?' cried Effie, with a look of wild dismay.

'I don't know; perhaps you will. You will either have this to do or something else. I don't think it matters much,' answered the child wearily. 'But don't talk to me, pray!'

And Effie had to hold her peace.

For a long long time they sat quiet together, till at length the child laid down the last of the long line of dresses, and gave a little sigh.

'They're all ready now, unless there should be anything to alter in them. Sometimes they don't fit, you know, and then that gives me a great deal of trouble,' she said, in her sad, patient voice.

Poor Effie's heart had been growing all this time heavier and heavier, and now it felt very like a lump of lead. She was frightened at this strange unchildlike child.

'I wish you would tell me who you are, and why you are made to do these things?' she said.

'The fairies make me do them,' the child replied. 'They taught me years and years ago.'

'But I *wouldn't* do them if I were you!' cried Effie indignantly. 'I wouldn't slave so for anybody!'

'Oh yes, you would,' replied the child quietly. 'You won't say that when you have been here a little while. I didn't do what I was told sometimes at first; but I always do it now. It's no use trying to escape anything here; you *can't* escape,' she said in her plaintive, hopeless way.

'But you must be miserable! How can you bear it? I think if they are as cruel to me as they are to you I shall die!' cried Effie.

'You can't do that. Nobody dies in fairy-land,' answered the child. 'It would be very easy indeed for us if we could die; but oh, no, no! we can't die here.'

'Do you mean then that you are to live on here for ever and ever?' cried poor Effie, quite white with consternation. 'And must I do it too?'

'I don't know; perhaps *you* may go home again,' answered the child. 'If somebody should come to claim you at the end of seven years, the fairies would be obliged to let you go. But nobody will ever come to claim me. I have been so long here that everybody belonging to me must be dead long ago.'

'How can that be when you are only a child the same as me?' cried Effie, staring at her with great eyes.

'Those who live here stay children for ever,' she answered sadly. 'I have been like this for years and years. Nothing ever changes or grows old in fairy-land.'

And then, as if she were tired of talking, she folded her hands and sat quite quiet, looking before her with weary eyes fixed on the silver river.

She seemed to have no interest at all in Effie, as if she hardly knew that she was one of the same race with herself, or as if she had been so long in fairy-land that she had ceased altogether to care for the old human world where she had been once a little child. That time was so long ago, you see ; she had perhaps almost forgotten it now,—almost ceased to remember what that other world had been like.

But Effie, as she sat and watched her, felt her heart growing fuller and fuller of tenderness, and pity, and pain. She was more than half afraid of her, and yet she wanted to go nearer to her, and be kind to her and kiss her, and try to make her wear some other look than that hopeless one which was so sad to see that it made the tears come into Effie's eyes. For a long time she sat still and wondered what she could do to cheer her and make her brighten up a little, like an earthly child ; and then at last she came to her, and softly stole an arm about her neck.

‘I want to love you. Do let me love you. I should so like to do it ; and I am so very, very sorry for you,’ she said ; and as the child looked up, like some one startled in a dream, she all at once stooped down and kissed her.

The child's colour came up all over her face.

‘Why do you do that? Nobody ever kissed me here before,’ she said, and trembled, and looked so strangely at Effie, and burst out crying. ‘Oh, you shouldn’t kiss me, to make me think of things long ago!’ she said.

But Effie, having kissed her once, proceeded without hesitation to kiss her again and again, and then, finding that the child still went on crying, she herself began to cry too for sympathy, and, sitting down close beside her, she hugged, and stroked, and petted, and cooed over her, like a turtle-dove, till, sorrowful little creature though she was, the strange child at last smiled and looked softly at Effie through her tears.

‘I had a little sister like you once,’ she said wistfully. ‘It was a long long time ago; but you make me think of her—she was so good.’

‘I’ll be like your little sister to you, if you’ll let me,’ Effie answered eagerly.

‘Will you?’ the child said. But the next moment she shook her head. ‘Ah, you think that now, but you would get tired soon,’ she said sadly; ‘for I can’t play. I never play now.’

‘But why shouldn’t you play? We’ll play together,’ cried Effie.

Yet still the child shook her head.

‘No, no; I couldn’t do it,’ she said. ‘I can only work now, and sometimes sit still for a little while and rest. I’m too tired to do anything else. *You’ll* get tired too, and not care about playing soon.’

‘Oh, dear me, shall I?’ cried poor Effie, and the tears started to her eyes.

‘Yes; I should think you would. You will, if you’re like me,’ said the child. ‘But it doesn’t matter very much, I suppose, whether we play or not.’ And then she sighed, and, slowly rising, began to collect the little frocks together into a basket that she had beside her.

‘You’re not going away, are you?’ Effie on this exclaimed anxiously.

But the child said—yes, she was obliged to go now, for the fairies would want her.

‘But you haven’t told me your name?’ cried Effie. ‘*My* name is Effie. What is yours?’

‘I haven’t had a name for so many years,’ the child said plaintively. ‘I was called Bertha once, long ago.’

‘Then I’ll call you Bertha now,’ said Effie. ‘And I wish you could stay. I shall be so dull without you. Can’t you come back again in a little while?’

But the child said the fairies would want her for a long time, because she had to help them to dress for their dance in the evening, so she certainly couldn’t come back.

‘They always have to be dressed every night, you know,’ she said; ‘and it’s a great business, for some of them are so cross that you can’t please them, do what you like. But I don’t mind much what they say now, though I did at first. One gets used to everything in time,’ the child said, in her sad patient way, and took

up her basket on her arm, and nodding at Effie with a little smile, she went away.

Effie stood looking after her till she was out of sight, then, sitting down again by the river's side, she began to think over all the child had said to her, and the more she thought of it the sadder she got. Suppose nobody should come for *her*, even at the end of seven years, and she should have to live in fairy-land for ever and ever, like Bertha, and to grow as sorrowful as Bertha was! Poor little Effie thought of the possibility of this till she made herself so miserable that at length she threw herself down with her face upon the grass, and almost wished that she was dead. And she lay there so long, sobbing and crying, that she fairly wore herself out; till at last she was so exhausted that her eyes began to close, quite unconsciously; and presently she fell fast asleep.

‘And there we’ll leave her, Children,’ said Cousin Trix, breaking off abruptly, ‘and she shall sleep till to-morrow afternoon.’

‘Oh, Cousin Trix, that’s a shame!’ cried the children.

But the dressing-bell had rung a quarter of an hour ago, as Cousin Trix very well knew, so she, naturally, wasn’t moved by the children’s remonstrances, but,

slipping through their hands, made for the door, and ran up-stairs as fast as she could to her own room.

‘Now, Cousin Trix, you’re to awaken Effie!’ the children exclaimed next afternoon.

Well, she had no objection to do that, Cousin Trix said, so, if they would sit down and be quiet, she would rouse her that minute.

The children accordingly took their seats, and Cousin Trix went on with her tale.





DOWN AMONGST THE FAIRIES.

PART II.

FFFIE slept the whole night long without ever once awakening, and was quite surprised and bewildered when at last, in the morning, she opened her eyes again ; and so indeed she might well be, for the thing that aroused her at last was a most curious little tapping going on all round and round her head, which, when she looked up, startled and confused, she found to proceed from the second of the three fairies who were to set her tasks to her, and who was stooping down over her, boxing her ears with all her might.

‘ Oh, so you’re going to awake at last !’ said the fairy. ‘ A pretty business I’ve had with you ! I’m sure you must have a skin like a rhinoceros, for I’ve been slapping you till the blood is tingling in all my *fingers*. It’s amazing how you mortals sleep ! But

come—don't sit there staring at me. Stand up and get your wits about you. I have something for you to do immediately.'

And with that the fairy led the way, and Effie followed her, till they came to where a most prodigious number of little shoes were lying, all in a great mass together—shoes of every colour and every shade of colour—more shoes, it seemed to Effie, than could possibly be needed to supply the whole of fairy-land.

'These have just come home from the shoemaker. You will go over them, and put them together in pairs,' the fairy said. 'It will be a very nice little amusement for you, and the easiest thing to do in all the world. Only mind you look sharp, and don't put odd shoes together, as from your stupidity I believe you would be quite capable of doing. Look!—this is the way to begin.' And with the speed of lightning, the fairy picked two little pale-blue shoes out of the great heap, and set them side by side upon the grass. 'Now, set to work, and don't waste time,' she said. 'I shall be back to see that you have finished in a couple of hours.'

And then she went off, and left Effie before the heap of shoes, that was so big that it was really like a little hill.

There were thousands and thousands of shoes. 'I wonder how I am ever to match them all!' Effie thought, and took up one at random, and began to

look about for its fellow. But it was very nearly as bad as looking for a needle in a bundle of hay! The shoes were so various, and the number of them was so great, that the more she looked at them the more she wondered how either she or anybody else was ever to get them all arranged into pairs. A dozen different shoes did she take up, one after another, and not the fellow could she find to a single one of them. Again and again she would *think* for a moment that she had matched a shoe; she would search about with a green one in her hand perhaps, and presently would hit upon another green one that seemed to be the very image of it, but no sooner would she have picked it out from among the rest than some minute shade of difference would show itself,—either there would be the least possible variation in the colour, or the one little shoe would have a button in front of it, and the other a tassel, or the one would be stitched with green and the other with red, or the one would have a high heel and the other a low heel, or in one of half-a-dozen other ways it would appear on examination that the two shoes didn't belong to each other, and Effie could do nothing but renew her search again and again and again till she was quite dispirited and weary.

After a time, just as she had done yesterday, she fell to crying for very vexation. She saw that it would be quite impossible to accomplish what the fairy had *told* her to do in the time that was allowed her, for

when a whole hour had passed, she had only out of the whole number matched two solitary pairs of shoes, and so at last (for you must remember that she was an idle little monkey, who had never yet in all her life really tried *hard* to do anything) she sat down upon the grass almost in a state of despair, and spent the second hour in doing nothing but crying and thinking how miserable she was, till the fairy come back.

Of course when the fairy *did* come back, she was, as you may imagine, in a pretty passion. She looked at the shoes, and then she looked at Effie, and then she declared that she had never been so much shocked or astonished in all her life.

'I've matched these two pairs, and I'm sure I tried for an hour with all my might, and I couldn't match another one of them,' said Effie, half-frightened, but quite as sulky as she was afraid.

'You tried for an hour, and only succeeded in matching two pairs of shoes!' cried the fairy. 'It's impossible! it's incredible! Look at *me*, you wicked child!' And with that the fairy began to pick up shoes here and there and in every direction from the mass, as fast as her fingers could move.

She was certainly *worth* looking at! Quickly as the first fairy had counted the leaves yesterday, *that* was really nothing compared with the quickness with which this second fairy matched her shoes. Effie's very eyes got dazzled as she looked at her. She skipped about the

mass, hither and thither, up and down, and with every skip she made she got together not only one but half-a-dozen pairs of shoes. Line after line of them she spread out upon the grass, long straight lines of bright coloured little slippers, all in twos and twos, till at the end of a quarter of an hour she had got every shoe paired, and, though she was certainly rather out of breath when her work was completed, yet that was little wonder, for she had run about so much that the only thing to cause any amazement was that she should have any breath left at all.

As soon as she could speak again she turned to Effie, and began to scold her with all her might. She told her that she was the wickedest and idlest and most obstinate child she ever had come across ; that it made her quite ill to look at her ; that as for pretending she couldn't match the shoes, that was such a transparent falsehood that it wouldn't even take in a baby ; that if she thought she was to get off as easily to-day as she had done yesterday she would find herself mistaken ; and then, pausing and shaking her head at Effie to such an extent that Effie began to think she would waggle it off, she clapped her hands, and half-a-dozen fairies as quick as thought came running forward, all armed with little birch brooms, and, laughing and kicking up their heels with delight at the prospect of the fun that was before them, they instantly seized on Effie, *and tore her frock off her shoulders, and began to*

belabour her poor little back with all their might and main.

It wasn't much like being beaten, but it was very much like being stung by wasps. Sharp, wicked little blows did they deal her in all directions, till, bite her lips as she would to keep from crying, the tears burst from her eyes, and the more they hurt her the more they leaped and grinned and laughed. You would have thought you never had seen six happier little creatures. Even when at last the fairy told them to stop they couldn't find it in their hearts to do it, but just paused for a moment or two, looking at Effie still with longing and unsatisfied eyes, and then fell on her again with one accord, so delighted that they were really quite beside themselves. They got a hearty second round of whipping before they were finally made to leave off; and the state in which poor little Effie's back was when at last they stopped striking her was something pitiable to look at.

So far from the fairy having any pity for her, however, all *she* seemed to think of when the business was over was Effie's good luck in not having been beaten ten times worse.

'It would have been a very different matter for you if you had had my youngest sister to deal with instead of me,' she told her. 'I'd advise you to turn over a new leaf before she and you meet to-morrow, my young lady, or I wouldn't stand in *your* shoes for something!'

And then the fairy shook her head with such terrific meaning, that poor Effie, frightened, thought if standing in her shoes to-morrow was to feel anything much worse than standing in them felt already to-day, she didn't wonder, indeed, that the fairy fancied she wouldn't like it.

As, however, it was no use to say this, she held her tongue ; and, after having looked at her for a few moments in this dreadful way, the fairy said that of course it was absurd to think that she was to spend the rest of this day, which she had begun so idly, in amusing herself, and that therefore she should proceed to lock her up ; and accordingly, whipping a little chain out of her pocket, she quickly whisked one end of it round Effie's waist, and then throwing the other round the branch of a tree, she fastened both securely with a pair of neat little padlocks, and left Effie to her meditations.

There was nothing for it, of course, but to sit still all day ; and very sadly Effie sat, and a very doleful day she had of it. She saw nothing of Bertha, nor of anybody else, and long before night came she was glad to curl herself up on the grass and cry herself to sleep. She had luckily a most healthy aptitude for sleeping, so that on the whole she managed to forget her troubles for a very considerable time. Indeed, when she had once gone to sleep, at a very early hour, she slept so comfortably and soundly that she never awoke again till the third fairy came next morning to rouse her.

The sight of *her*, however, I can tell you, made her open her eyes pretty quickly.

‘Humph! you’ve had a fine idle time of it,’ said the fairy, looking at her ill-temperedly. ‘You’ve been fast asleep all night, I’ve no doubt? I declare I believe you mortals could sleep for ever!’ and she looked so disgusted that Effie felt quite ashamed.

‘I hadn’t anything else to do, I’m sure,’ said Effie rather humbly. On which the fairy took her up sharp enough.

‘Oh, you had nothing else to do, had you?’ she said. ‘We’ll mend that, my dear. You shan’t have nothing to do again in a hurry, if that’s what you have to complain of. Nothing to do! upon my word!’ And as if she couldn’t at all get over it, the fairy fell to chuckling to herself with all her might, and went on chuckling to such an extent when she had once begun that at last she couldn’t stop, but brought on such a dreadful fit of coughing that Effie thought she would be choked. She was quite blue in the face when she came to herself again; and of course, as you may imagine, her temper wasn’t at all improved by this little accident.

‘Come here! What are you gaping at? Ugh! Ugh!’ she called out angrily to Effie, as soon as she could speak, and, catching her by the waist, she unlocked the chain with a snap, and clapped it in her pocket. ‘Now, come with me; I have something for you to do,’ she said sharply; and so Effie and she

walked off together, till, after a few minutes, they met a little elf who was coming towards them laden with two great bags. These the fairy took, and turned out the contents of one of them on the grass ; and very pretty contents they were : hundreds and hundreds of little skeins of silk of every hue,—quite miniature fairy skeins, that were the prettiest little things, Effie thought, that she had ever seen.

As soon as they were all spread out the fairy opened the other bag, and tossed forth a prodigious number of little reels.

‘Now, set to work and wind these silks,’ she said, ‘and see that you do it neatly and quickly. It’s the very easiest work in all the world, or else, I really believe,’ and she frowned at Effie so frightfully that Effie shook in her shoes, ‘I really believe you would be capable of telling me you couldn’t do it. But in this case that would really be too absurd. Set to work now and don’t waste time. As there are a good many skeins I will allow you four hours for winding them.’

And then the fairy went off and left Effie to herself.

‘Well, Effie had often wound skeins of silk before now, —it was a kind of thing, indeed, that she quite liked to do ; so, feeling a good deal comforted that her task for to-day was nothing worse than this, she took up a beautiful little rose-coloured skein, and began carefully to unfasten the knot in which it was tied, and to open it out, and then, selecting one of the little reels, she pre-

pared to wind away. But alas for Effie's hopes of winding the fairy silk ! At every touch she gave the thread it broke in two ; handle it as cautiously as she might, it snapped in her fingers a dozen times in a minute. She tried, and tried, but she could no more wind it than she could have wound spiders' webs.

What in the world was Effie to do ? By the end of a quarter of an hour she had given up trying, and was sitting on the grass with her hands folded on her knees, too miserable and frightened almost to cry. And so I think she would have sat till the whole four long hours were ended, if a joyful interruption had not presently come to her. What should she see all at once but Bertha coming running towards her !

'Oh Bertha !' she cried out joyfully at this sight, and sprang up and would have thrown her arms about her neck ; but Bertha was evidently in a desperate hurry, and had no time for any little ceremonies of this kind.

'I've come to show you how to wind these silks,' she cried, all breathless. 'No, no ; don't kiss me, please. Sit down here and look at what I do, for I've hardly a minute to stay.' And without waiting another moment she caught up one of the skeins, and opening it as quick as lightning, began to show Effie what to do.

All kinds of wonderful little tricks and dexterous contrivances she showed her by which, in spite of the fineness of the fairy silk, it was made possible for human fingers to wind it. They were not easy to learn, and

Effie for a time thought that she should never make anything of them at all ; but the child, who was the most patient little teacher you could conceive, made her try again and again, till at last she got the knack of them, and wound off a whole skein, while the child looked on, without breaking the thread once.

‘ Now you know all I can teach you, and I must not stay another moment,’ Bertha said then, and jumped up from the grass, where she had been sitting by Effie’s side, and dropped a quick kiss upon her lips and ran away ; and Effie, left alone once more, went on with her work so cheerily and briskly that at the end of the four hours, when the fairy came back, she had finished winding every skein that had been in the bag, save three.

You should have seen the fairy’s face when she caught sight of all the neatly-filled reels, and saw Effie sitting in the midst of them winding away and singing to herself. She was in such a rage (feeling naturally, poor thing, that she had been shamefully ill-used and cheated) that, quite beside herself, she sprang at Effie, and began to cuff her all about the head and face with her little fists like a perfect fury. To be sure, after a minute or two, when she had by this means relieved her feelings a little, she said that what she was so angry about was not that so many skeins were already wound, but that Effie had been so idle that three of them still remained to be done ; but she looked so

very sour and morose, being indeed quite yellow in the face, that it was easy to guess that *that* was not very likely to be the whole cause of her wrath. It was, however, one of those hard cases of disappointment which must be submitted to in silence; so the fairy, though she had scarcely ever been crosser in her life, was obliged presently, in a very grumbling, ill-tempered way, to tell Effie that since she had really managed for once to get her task accomplished (though indeed it was most abominably done, the fairy said, taking up one of the neat little reels and shrugging her shoulders contemptuously as she looked at it, and then flung it away), she might go and do what she pleased for the next hour or two, until she had time to set her some new task; 'for I've plenty to do without spending the whole day in looking after *you*,' she said spitefully. 'It would be a pretty thing if I were to occupy myself with nothing but that!' And she went off snorting at this idea, just as if somebody had proposed it to her. We all say such funny things, you know, sometimes, when we're cross.

Well, children! [said Cousin Trix,] I can't go on telling you all that Effie did on each separate day she lived in fairy-land, or my story would never come to an end. You must imagine the greater part of it for yourselves. It was a strange kind of life, and a hard life too. Day after day the three fairies set Effie some prodigious task to do, and day after day, with Bertha's

help, Effie got through it somehow or other ; till by degrees what had seemed so difficult at first became practicable, and sometimes almost easy. For people learn fast in fairy-land, and those who stay there long become able to do amazingly clever things ; as, of course, Effie's mother had known very well when she resolved to send her little girl there. Effie, if she had stayed at home, would never have learnt one-tenth part of the wonderful things that she soon came to do quite dexterously amongst the fairies,—dexterously, and even readily, for, to give them all the credit they deserved, the fairies did assuredly cure Effie of her idleness many a long day before her seven years with them were ended. Once only did she shirk a task that was set her, not because it was too difficult for her to do, but because she chose instead of doing it to play with some foolish little elves who came and tempted her. A fine stolen game they had of it that morning, and a fine price she paid for it ! For seven whole days and nights afterwards the fairies kept her in solitary confinement, on the smallest imaginable quantity of bread and water ; and she was whipt twice every day. On the eighth day, when they let her loose again, poor little Effie, quite spirit-broken and terrified, declared that she never would be idle again in fairy-land ; and I am happy to say, [added Cousin Trix,] that she kept her word.

So, more and more industriously, and more and more deftly, she went on week after week, and month

after month, doing her daily tasks ; and when work-time was over, many a wild game she used to have with the madcap elves, and in the evenings, and in the clear long summer nights (it is always summer in fairy-land) many an hour did she spend in watching the fairies as they danced upon the green, and held their gay midnight revels, and a most amazing amount of merriment and fun she heard and saw.

And so, taking one thing with another, perhaps you think that on the whole Effie had a tolerably pleasant time of it ? My dears, in spite of all its loveliness, and in spite of all its mirth, Effie had not been a month in fairy-land before she thought it was the very saddest and the dreariest place that she had ever so much as dreamt of. It had indeed seemed to her at first that if she could but play all day long like the little imps she might lead a most delightful life ; but she very soon began to find out that what suits an imp and makes him quite contented is something very different indeed from the kind of thing that suits a human being. A blessed thing was it for Effie that she could *not* be happy as the fairies were ! A sorrowful thing would it have been for her if she could ! Merriment is good, Children, and so are light hearts and laughing faces ; but merriment, where there is not a *light* heart, but no heart at all, and laughter that has nothing to do with the soul, but is only like the crackling of thorns in the fire, are in the long-run about as dreary and sor-

rowful things to have to do with as you could light upon in the course of a long summer's day.

It would have been sad indeed for Effie if in all this brilliant fairy-land she had had only the fairies themselves to be her playfellows and companions. But you know she was more fortunate than this, for she had Bertha ; and if ever two children were a blessing to one another, these two were. I can hardly tell you how dearly they came to love each other. To Effie, Bertha grew the best thing in all the world, except her mother. To Bertha, Effie became like the whole world put together. She had had nothing till Effie came—no hope of anything, no care for anything—nothing but the prospect of endless days without any light of gladness. She was all frozen up, you know, when Effie saw her first, like a creature half dead. And then Effie came and gave a new life to her. Imagine how she must have loved her for such a gift ! Think what it must have been to have lived for so many years that she had lost all count of them in this soulless fairy-land, and then all of a sudden to gain the light of Effie's presence and the blessing of Effie's love !

Many a long happy hour did the two children spend together,—whenever they could manage it doing their work side by side, passing every leisure moment that was possible with one another, walking about the beautiful fairy gardens, and playing in the golden sunshine, and talking-talking-talking for ever of the dear

old world that one of them thought she should never see again.

This was their one great sorrow,—the thought that at the end of Effie's seven years Bertha must be left in fairy-land alone. As the time drew nearer and nearer the more heavily this sorrow weighed upon them, and the sadder they became. Once, the time for their separation had seemed so far off ; but, by degrees, the years had dwindled down to months, and the months would soon be only weeks. What should they do ? they used to say, clinging together, with their arms about each other's neck, and sobbing sometimes as if their hearts would break. Must the old, sad, lonely life really begin for Bertha again ?—was there no possibility of escape for her too as well as Effie ?

They used to talk about it to one another day after day for hours.

'Oh, I can't leave you here!—I can't!—I love you better than all the world !' Effie cried out passionately at last one day, feeling that she would almost rather stay in fairy-land for ever, and never see her mother's face again, than go away without Bertha. 'I can't leave you here !' she cried out, sobbing again and again.

'Why don't you take her away with you then ?' asked a sharp little voice close to them, and turning round with a start (for they had thought they were quite alone) they found a little elf close at their heels, who grinned and laughed and nodded his head at them,

and squeaked again in his shrill, cracked voice, 'Why don't you take her away with you?'

'How can I?' Effie cried, and looked more than half-frightened, for it was no joke to think of what they had been talking about being overheard by a pair of ears it wasn't meant for. 'You're talking nonsense, you know,' said Effie, pretending to be quite contemptuous. 'How could I take her or anybody else away?'

But on this the fairy began to grin, and nod, and wink so knowingly, that the children's hearts beat fast.

'Hold her fast and try,' said the fairy, and fell to cutting capers in the air with all his might. 'What should I know about it? Hold her fast and try!' cried the mischievous imp, and suddenly began to throw himself head over heels at such a rate that in half a minute he was out of sight.

The two children looked in one another's eyes when he was gone, with a wild, trembling light of hope in either face. It was too likely that the fairy had only been jeering at them. But suppose it possible that he had not?

'Oh, Bertha, I will hold you fast, if that is all!' Effie cried, and threw her arms round Bertha's neck and hugged her. And then they laughed together, and then they cried, hardly knowing what they did. Oh, if it *could* but be that Bertha might be carried away from fairy-land!

The thought was never out of their heads again after

that day. They could not forget what the imp had said, and could think of nothing else from morning to night. Come what might of it, they resolved at last that they would try to do as he had said.

You may fancy how, after this, they longed for the end of the seven years to come, and yet how they dreaded it. When the actual day arrived at length that was to decide their fate, they were quite feverish and sick with suspense. How would it all be? What would happen? What would be the end?

'They will only part with you in the same hour in which they brought you here,' Bertha said. 'If you are asked for sooner than that, or later, they won't give you up.' So all through the day the children did their customary tasks, and never a word did the three task-giving fairies say to show that they had the faintest recollection that Effie's seven years had expired. On the contrary, whenever they came across her they looked so innocent and unsuspecting of anything whatever that their faces had no more expression in them than those of new-born babies.

'They must have forgotten altogether about my going,' thought Effie to herself, quite uncomfortable in her doubt as to whether or not she should mention the fact to them. But Bertha advised her to hold her peace. The fairies might be trusted to look after their own memories, she said.

So the day passed on, and the evening came, and

then, sure enough, when it could not be any longer delayed, the fairies thought proper to open their lips.

‘I believe this is the night your mother talked of coming for you,’ the first fairy said carelessly, yawning, and speaking as if she was altogether thinking of something else. ‘She isn’t very likely to come, I fancy, but you may as well be ready for her in case she should.’

‘Oh dear no, she isn’t the least likely to come,’ said the second fairy, as if it were quite absurd to think of such a thing. ‘You may get ready if you like, but I know it will surprise *me* vastly if we see anything of her.’

‘And everybody else too, I should think,’ said the third fairy snappishly. ‘Do go away and employ yourself on something useful. There’s nothing more offensive to me than to see people hanging about and wasting time.’

And then off the fairies went again, and left poor Effie more uneasy and terrified than ever.

Suppose her mother really should forget? Suppose nobody should come to claim her, and that they should both be left to live for ever in fairy-land? The two children sat together through the long evening, holding each other’s hands. They could hardly any longer speak, they were in such suspense and terror. When the hour that was to end all doubt came at last, they went together, almost without a word, to the gate that was to open now or never to let them pass out.

It was late at night, and everything was quiet and dark. They had decided that Effie should wait beside the gate, and that Bertha should hide amongst the bushes until the last great moment came. When the time arrived for them to part they kissed each other with a long, long kiss, and then went each to her place. They could not see one another after that, and they did not dare to speak.

Through all her seven years in fairy-land Effie thought she had never seen a night so still and dark. The fairies, at their revels somewhere far away, were dancing perhaps by fairy-light ; but *here* there was not a star visible in the sky, and the clouds hung heavy and black like lead. Not a gleam of light nor a living creature was near, save the solitary fairy, a very crusty old imp, who always had charge of the gate, and who was sitting beside it now in his arm-chair, fast asleep.

The children tried to count the minutes as they passed, but they could not do it ; they only knew that they waited, waited, waited, till their hearts were faint. Long before the hour had really come to an end they thought it *must* be ended, and their hope be gone for ever. Many an hour had seemed long to them before in fairy-land, but never one like this.

Slowly the minutes went on, and slowly one quarter followed another. The third had passed a good while when, at last, the silence was broken by a sound. Nearer and nearer it came, more and more distinct,

and Effie's heart leapt to her lips ; for it was the sound of carriage-wheels.

'Mother! Mother!' she cried, and her wild screams wakened the cross old fairy at the gate.

'What's the matter with you? Hold your tongue,' he growled. But she flew to him, hardly knowing what she did, and pulled and dragged at him as he sat.

'It's my mother come for me! It's my mother come for me! Oh, open the gate!' she cried.

'Let your mother speak for herself, then, if she *has* come for you; but I don't believe a word of it,' answered the elf.

Just as he said the last syllable, however, rat-tat-tat! came a great knocking at the gate.

'Mother!' cried Effie again.

'Effie! my little one!' answered a glad voice from the other side.

And then Effie felt something rising in her throat and choking her, and she couldn't speak again. She could only turn round in the darkness and feel for Bertha's hand.

The fairy had opened a little loop-hole in the gate, and called out crossly, 'Who's there, and what d' you want?'

'I want my child,' answered Effie's mother gently. 'I have come to reclaim her from fairy-land.'

'Humph! it's just like you mortals,' grumbled the

old imp. 'Always wanting one thing or another. Why couldn't you stay at home an hour or two longer, and let me have out my sleep? Well, well,—if you must have her then, stand back.' And he began sulkily to unfasten the bolts and bars.

The two children's hands were locked together.

'Effie, hold me fast!' whispered poor little trembling Bertha; and Effie held her fast, and breathless and panting they waited for the door to open.

How many fastenings there seemed to be to it! and how slowly the fairy shot back the bolts and loosed the bars, and turned the key! But it was done at last. The gate, as it began to open, creaked upon its hinges, and the children, with their hearts upon their lips, were springing forward, when—

'Treason!' hoarsely shouted the old doorkeeper. 'Treason! thieves! murder! fire!'

The half-opened gate fell shut again with a clang, the fairy screamed and croaked like an old raven, and, pulling his alarm-bell with all his might, sent out a peal that sounded through all the length and breadth of fairy-land. In twenty seconds the very air was full of fairies; on they came in shoals, some scampering forward on their feet, some mounted upon horseback, some riding upon broomsticks,—shrieking, gabbling, groaning, howling; troop after troop of them with lighted torches, that made all the place in half a minute as bright as day, or brighter, for as they flashed

about, hither and thither, up and down, the very air seemed all on fire.

A hundred of them swarmed round Effie's feet ; a dozen of them leaped upon her back, pinching her, scratching her, pulling her, dragging her now here now there, this way and that, shaking her, pecking at her eyes, tearing out her hair, scolding her, screaming at her, deafening and dazing her.

What *were* she and Bertha to do ?

'Effie, hold me fast !' still cried poor Bertha's shaking voice ; but even while she spoke it was no longer Bertha that was clinging to her, but a great tiger with hot glaring eyes and fierce claws ready to gripe and rend her.

'Oh!!' shrieked little Effie at this sight, and all but loosed her hold ; but—'Effie, Effie, hold me fast!' once more cried Bertha's despairing voice, and Effie gave a gasp, and caught her tight again, and held her fast with all her might.

Sharp as lightning, and quick as thought, one horror followed on another ; it was a serpent now that hissed into her face, and tried to wriggle its scaly body from her grasp, and now a vulture that swooped on her and griped her, and now some slimy thing whose slow cold touch made her shudder to the marrow of her bones ; and now a lion, and now an ape, and now a hideous creature with something of a human face that laughed and grinned, and tore at her, and mocked her. But



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still through it all, like a faint wailing in the air, came Bertha's voice—'Oh Effie, hold me fast!' and still, through everything, brave little Effie held her. Until at last—at last!—clinging to her with her trembling hands,—the fairies' wicked witcheries all exhausted,—there once more at her side, where all the horrid forms had been, stood panting Bertha in her proper shape.

And then there came a clap like the wildest crack of thunder, and from every fairy's lip broke forth a wail and howl; the lights went out; the gate swung open; and with a cry, as if for joy their very hearts were breaking, the children gave one great spring across the threshold, and Effie leapt into her mother's arms.

This was rather a terrific ending, and for a moment or two the children looked quite solemnized by it. After a pause, the first one who began to speak was Jack.

'Cousin Trix,' said Jack, with a little hesitation, 'I think that's rather a horrid story. The fairies are not always so bad as that.'

'Well, my dear,' replied Cousin Trix, 'I should be sorry to be unjust to them, but my own opinion is, that they are spiteful little folk. How, indeed, *could* you expect creatures to be very good who have no hearts in their bosoms?'

'But they might be good-natured without any hearts,' suggested Jack.

'I shouldn't like to depend much on *your* good nature if you had no heart, Jack,' responded Cousin Trix ; on which the children laughed.

'You always finish off your stories so abruptly,' said Daisy. 'They never come to a proper end. What became of Bertha after she and Effie got away? Did she go home?'

'No, my dear, she had no home to go to,' replied Cousin Trix. 'Of course the question of what was to become of her was duly taken into consideration by Effie's father and mother ; but as it appeared on investigation that she had probably been for about a hundred and fifty years in fairy-land' ('Oh!' cried the children all together ; but Cousin Trix went on quite unmoved) 'it soon became pretty clear that she could not expect with much reason that any of the members of her family should recognise her. So, as she had nobody else to love her but Effie, and as Effie certainly loved her better than anything else in the world, it was finally settled that she and Effie should be brought up together like sisters.'

'And did they go on being fond of one another, Cousin Trix?' asked Mabel.

'They went on being so fond of one another,' replied Cousin Trix, 'that they never could bear to be separated day or night, or to do anything apart. They

learnt all their lessons together,—and Bertha was such a staid and steady little creature that she kept Effie quite staid and steady too for all the rest of her life. Of course I need hardly tell you that they had both to work pretty hard at their books and their music, and so on, to make up for lost time, and that most of the accomplishments they had learnt in fairy-land were not exactly of a nature to be useful to them in after life ; but yet the *habit* of industry which they had acquired there was the greatest possible good to them, for it helped them to go cheerily and hopefully to every labour that was set them, and made them feel as if no task that they were given was ever a trouble or a toil.'

'And so then, after all, it was a good thing for Effie, I suppose, Cousin Trix, that she was carried away to fairy-land?' said Daisy speculatively.

But Cousin Trix smiled, and said she would leave her to settle that point for herself.

'For my own part I can't but allow that I think it was a hazardous experiment,' she admitted ; 'but then you must remember, Daisy, you and I live in the nineteenth century, and Effie's mother lived in the dark ages, and that makes all the difference in the world,—for, of course, *we* in our wisdom, without any help from the fairies, know the best way of curing idle little girls, as well as of doing everything else.'

Upon this the children looked a little doubtfully at Cousin Trix, but when they tried to find out whether

she was speaking in jest or earnest, she sprang up from her chair laughing, and couldn't be got to say another word.

The next afternoon, when Cousin Beatrix came up to the schoolroom, instead of asking her to tell them a story the children all fell to talking (which they were almost as fond of doing as of listening while *she* talked); and after a while the subject they took to talking about was what they would all like to be and to do when they were grown up.

'We had such a fine game at *Wishes* last night, Cousin Trix,' Daisy began; 'and we each made up our mind exactly all about what we would like best.'

'That was an excellent piece of work to accomplish all in the course of a single night,' Cousin Trix replied. 'Let me hear, then, Daisy, to begin with, exactly what *you* would like best.'

Upon which Daisy drew her stool to Cousin Trix's side, and planted her elbows on her knees, and propped her chin upon her hands, and began to expound her views.

'I've settled that I wouldn't be a queen,' said Daisy placidly, 'because queens seem always obliged to do so many things that they don't want to do, and to have such a troublesome time of it altogether; but I should

like to be a princess, and to be the most beautiful princess that was ever seen.'

'Then you would run the risk of having a good deal of trouble too, Daisy, I suspect,' put in Cousin Trix; 'not to mention the chance there would be of your becoming a queen in the end, after all. However, go on.'

'I would be the most beautiful and the cleverest princess that ever was known,' Daisy proceeded, preferring wisely to take no notice of Cousin Trix's interruption. 'And I would be very rich, of course, and would give away heaps of money, and do a great deal of good; and I would have a beautiful palace, and all the people that I liked best should live with me in it, and every night I would have a great party, and invite all the cleverest people in the country to come to it,—whether they were great people or not, you know; and then, after a good long time, I would choose one of them, who should be the cleverest of them all,—I should like him, I think, to be a poet,—and I would marry him, Cousin Trix,' said Daisy complacently.

'Dear me! that would be rather an unjustifiable proceeding, wouldn't it, Daisy?' inquired Cousin Trix in a tone of anxiety. And all the other children burst out laughing.

'Oh, Cousin Trix, Daisy is getting such a conceited little goose,' Hercules cried, 'that she thinks anybody in the world would be ready to marry her!'

Upon which, of course, Daisy indignantly denied that she ever thought anything of the sort, and a little passage of arms ensued between her and Jack, which was only put a stop to by the interference of Cousin Trix.

‘Come, let us hear about your own thoughts, Jack, and don’t mind any more about Daisy’s,’ she said.

So then Jack began to hold forth.

Jack would like to be a great discoverer, it seemed, and to find out all kinds of things that nobody had ever dreamt of finding out before. He didn’t care to be particularly rich, but he should like always to have just as much money as he wanted, and never to be bothered by anything of that kind. Indeed, he especially desired never to be bothered by any thing of *any* kind, but always to have his own way, and not to be worried by other people. He thought, on the whole, that if he could be as great a man as Sir Isaac Newton he should be pretty well satisfied; but of course he wouldn’t object to be a little greater.

Then Roger came forward, and said he didn’t care two sticks for Sir Isaac Newton. *He* should like to go to sea and to be an admiral. He would first go round the world, like Captain Cook,—that is, he meant he should like first to *be* Captain Cook, and do exactly what he did, and then, having just for a beginning got through that little stroke of work, for the rest of his life he should like to be Lord Nelson. And if only his father would let him be a sailor, and if a great war

would break out some ten or twelve years after this, Roger hinted pretty broadly that he did not see why there should be much difficulty about the matter.

But all this time little Mabel said nothing. So at last Cousin Trix turned to her, and asked her what *she* would like best. She had not much to say in answer. She hesitated for a moment,—for she had not been playing with the rest last night, she told Cousin Trix,—and then she just said gently that she should like, she thought, to love somebody who was very good and great. Upon which, with a smile, Cousin Trix laid her hand softly upon Queen Mab's hair, and made no reply to her for a minute.

The other children, however, went on talking as fast as ever.

‘I don't see what would be the good of merely loving somebody,’ exclaimed Daisy frankly. ‘I would much rather have people love *me*.’

‘So they would, fast enough, if you were like Queen Mab,’ answered Jack bluntly. ‘But *she*'s not always thinking of herself, as you are.’

‘Oh, but I *was* thinking of myself just now, Jack,’ interposed little Mabel earnestly. ‘And I mean I should like better than anything else to love somebody very much,—even though I wasn't to be loved myself at all, you know.’

‘Well, I should call that absurd,’ said Daisy, and gave a contemptuous little laugh.

‘I am sure *I* would never bother myself about anybody who didn’t for *me*,’ exclaimed Roger manfully.

‘Children, once upon a time—’ abruptly said Cousin Trix.

‘Oh, Cousin Trix, are you beginning a story?’ they all cried, and gathered round her.

‘I’m going to tell you a fable,’ said Cousin Trix. ‘You won’t think much of it as a story, I daresay; but if you don’t like it it won’t much matter, because it’s very short. And indeed, now I think of it, I’ll just tell it to Queen Mab, and the rest of you can go on talking, if you like. So, Mabel, you and I will sit side by side.’

The others, however, did not seem to approve of this arrangement; and, though Cousin Trix proceeded to address her story entirely to Queen Mab, the rest of the children chose, as usual, to take their places round her. The fable that Cousin Trix told was this:—



A VERY OLD STORY.



ONCE upon a time, Queen Mab [she said],—I don't know in the least how long ago it was, but I fancy it must have been many hundred years since,—there was a beautiful garden of very fine bright flowers, and amongst them (not in the midst of them, because most of them looked down upon her a good deal, and some of them even went the length of thinking that she wasn't fit to be the companion of such very fine creatures as they were at all) there grew a certain yellow flower.

I can't say, though I am sorry for it, that she was a beautiful flower. She was very tall and large and well-grown ; but she was not pretty in shape, nor was she delicately made, nor sweetly scented. She had very few of the graces of a flower, and she knew this quite well, and was on the whole, I think, a very gentle and

humble creature ; who, if she could not hide herself (and she was too big to do that), was at any rate meekly content to be planted in quite a back out-of-the-way place, where not many people ever noticed her, and where she had few companions of any kind. She used to look at the other flowers many a time, I think, and wish that she had been made like some of them ; for, though she was ugly herself, she loved all things that were beautiful so dearly ; and sometimes, when her gay companions would laugh at her for being so awkward and ungainly and unattractive, the poor yellow flower would droop her head to the ground, and shed her very leaves for shame and sorrow ; but she never got angry or gave way to envious feelings, or tried to carry herself with an air, as if she would say that she was as good as anybody else, and could make as fine a show as the rest of them ; for she knew quite well that she was *not* as good as most of the others were, and that she never could be, because the excellence of a flower lies in its loveliness, and without loveliness it is hardly worth the ground it grows in.

It was a very beautiful garden, full of rich scents and brilliant colours. Flowers of every kind were there, and of every variety of disposition. Some of them were very grand and haughty (I think a few of them must have wanted to be princesses, like Daisy), and a good many, even of the very finest ones, were very *amiable* and friendly ; and some were very silly and

conceited ; and some were very ill-natured and terribly given to backbiting ; and a great many were just nice, pleasant, chatty little things, with nothing particular about them of any sort ; and a few were proud and stupid ; and two or three were beautiful, and good, and gracious above all the rest. These were the kings and queens of the garden, and all the others did homage to them, and acknowledged their rule,—most of them quite willingly and joyfully, and even those envious ones who loved them least with a sort of dogged, angry submission.

But amongst them all none did homage to them more gladly than the poor despised yellow flower. Many and many a day as she stood apart she would lift her face towards them, and warm herself with the sight of their grace and loveliness. ‘Oh sweet flowers,’ she would murmur to herself, ‘look towards me, that I may live and grow glad in the sight of you ! Put forth more and more blossoms, fill the air with richer and richer perfume, and let me look upon you and love you for ever ! If I might, I would be beautiful too, as you are ; but I am poor and ugly and mean, and I can only stand far off and worship you.’ And though they took but little notice of her, for they knew nothing of her love, yet day after day went on, and she never changed or tired.

And so she lived for a long time, till the summer days grew long and bright. And then one day, when all the

many-coloured garden was lying bathed in a great glow of splendour, it happened at length that she began to wonder whence it was that this great daily light around her came. She had accepted it always until now (as we accept many a blessing) without reflection or surprise ; but to-day at last it began to fill her with a strange feeling of delight, and with a new sudden sense of beauty. What was it, she began to ask herself, this glorious illumination that was poured out over them ; that was filling all the earth and air,—lying golden on the grass, falling in showers of gold amongst the trees, lighting up each splendid flower with a fresh splendour that was not his own ?

She looked all round her, but the bright earth only told her that it was bathed in a great unutterable glory ; she raised her head, but the blue sky only repeated to her the same tale. *Light* there was everywhere ; but the *source* of light, where was that ? She spent the long summer day in an ever-increasing longing to behold it ; she only found it when the long day was almost gone. Throned in his golden chariot she discovered him at last ; and as he was sinking in the wide west crimsoned sky her eyes for the first time looked on the sun.

My story is a very short one, Children, [said Cousin Trix,] and I think you know the end of it even already. The poor yellow flower, with her great passionate love for beauty, gave that one look into the sun-god's face, and never afterwards, from his rising to his setting,

turned her gaze from him any more. She loved him in that one first look as she never yet had loved any earthly thing, and from that moment she gave up all her life to worship him. The green world was very fair ; but she had found another thing at last that was greater than the world, and another beauty that was more beautiful to her than its most splendid flowers.

Do you want to know if she was happy in her new love, Queen Mab ? [asked Cousin Trix after a moment's silence.] Well, I don't know if she was happy, as most people understand happiness, for she loved what she could never reach to, and she desired what she could never gain ; but perhaps she found something in her lot that was better in the end than common gladness.

I think that for a time at first she was full of sorrow, and of a wild, great, restless yearning ; and that, as she turned her face to the sun in that long-enduring gaze of hers, some bitter cries that he could not hear must have burst occasionally from her heart ; and as he rode high in heaven, millions of miles away from her, she must have sighed and moaned, I think, with many sorrowful words.

'Oh, stoop and look at me,' perhaps she used to cry, 'or call me up, and let me come to where you are ! I am a poor, undesired, unlovely flower ; but I look into your face the whole day long and love you. From your rising to your setting, I turn my eyes to you. I lie beneath you, outspread like a sacrifice.'

But I fancy that presently she would by degrees cease her lamentations and her vain appeals ; and then slowly she would begin, perhaps, to murmur to herself—

‘ He does not hear me ; he will never hear me or care for me ; but I shall love him all the same until I die. He has been the glory of my life to me,—its brightness and its beauty ; and for his sake I will love all lovely and all noble things. I would have lived for him and died for him ! I would, if I might, have given all my life to have reached up to him but for one short day ; but now I know that that will never be.’

And then, last of all, I think she would learn this—which perhaps would be the hardest thing of all—that, even if she could have won her wish, it would have brought no joy to her, but only disappointment and grief. For how could she have lived the sun’s life ? or what union could there have ever been between the coarse and common flower of earth, and the golden-charioted king ? She might love him with her whole heart ; but she could have neither part nor lot with him. He was too far away from her ; too far above her. If she ever could have reached up to his throne his heat would have withered and his light would have killed her.

And this truth, too, the passionate sun-flower had to learn sorrowfully ; and then, like all the rest, sorrowfully and patiently to accept.

But yet there are sadder lives by many a one, it

seems to me, than hers, my dear!—even though she never gained, and never *could* gain her heart's desire. And I fancy too, that she knew that well herself, and would not have exchanged her high, lonely worship for all else that the world could have given her. Better, she must have thought, unknown and uncared for, to love the sun in his unapproachable greatness, than to have won the love of any other thing on earth.

And I think that she was right, [added Cousin Trix softly, after a moment's silence,] and that such an affection as hers must have raised and purified her whole life. For the noblest love is that which does not seek its own reward ; perhaps, the noblest is most often that which never gains it.

It was a good thing certainly that Cousin Trix's story was a short one, for, to tell the truth, the children thought very little of it ; and indeed I am afraid, if it had lasted very much longer, Daisy and Roger, at any rate, would have dropped away from the number of her audience. Jack, to be sure, made a considerable show of listening attentively to the end ; but it was visible enough that even he thought it a dull affair. Queen Mab alone nodded her thoughtful little head in approval when Cousin Trix had finished, and then sat still and meditated for a few minutes while the others began to chatter (not about the fable, you may be sure—for *it*

was really such a poor apology for a story, that they all felt it was the most delicate thing to take no notice of it,—but about quite other matters) ; and in two or three minutes everybody was quite merry and lively again, and such a chattering was kept up round Cousin Trix's chair that there was no peace for her till the ringing of the dressing-bell made it possible for her at last to run away.

The children next day felt decidedly shy of asking Cousin Trix to tell them another story, and were extremely doubtful in their minds whether it would be desirable to say, or even to hint, anything about it, for after what had happened yesterday they really had very strong suspicions that Cousin Trix's inventive powers must be running dry. So, for nearly half-an-hour after she came, as usual, to the schoolroom, everybody in the most marked way avoided the slightest reference to stories or story-telling, and you would have thought that the idea of such things in connexion with Cousin Trix had never entered any of their minds.

After they had had a good deal of talk and play with her, however, and she had seemed, to all appearance, to have just as much life and spirit left in her as ever, their confidence began gradually to return ; and at last, after beating about the bush for a little while, Jack said bluntly—

‘ If you could think of another story not quite as dull

as yesterday's, I wish you would tell it to us, Cousin Trix.'

'Why, what in the world was the matter with yesterday's story, Jack?' asked Cousin Trix, and opened her eyes as if she was quite amazed, and had not an idea until that moment but that Jack and all the others too had been fairly delighted with it. But Jack looked in her face for a moment to see whether or not she was in earnest; and then all the children, and Cousin Trix as well, began to laugh.

'Ah, you're silly little geese, Children!' cried Cousin Trix. 'There's nobody has a bit of common sense amongst you except Queen Mab. But come, if you want another story, take your places, and I'll do the best for you I can.'

So the children were soon seated, and then Cousin Trix began.





BLUE-EYES AND LONG-TAIL.

 H dear me! little does any one know who has never tried it, what it is to be the mother of a large family!' cried a fat old mouse to herself, dropping down in a corner quite exhausted. 'Such a life as I have! There's no end to the trouble of it. Nothing but worry and anxiety with these silly young things from morning to night! Oh dear dear me!' And then she began to rock herself to and fro, and to fan her face with her handkerchief, for it was very hot weather, and she was quite knocked up with a great fright that she had just been having about two or three of her sons and daughters.

And, indeed, it *was* a trying life that she led, and her family from first to last had been so exceedingly numerous that if she had not always made it a point to get rid

of her children as soon as ever they were fully grown up, and to dismiss them entirely from her memory as fast as she got them off her hands, I don't think she could ever have stood the wear and tear of it at all. But it was quite bad enough even as it was, for she was never without a troop of troublesome young things following at her heels, and getting into mischief and danger from morning to night, and from night to morning again, so that in the whole course of the twenty-four hours she could sometimes scarcely get a quiet moment either for sleep or meditation.

On the whole, however, considering how terribly she was tried, the mother-mouse had not been a bad mother, as mice go ; she had taken an immense deal of trouble to make all her sons sharp and cunning, so that when she turned them out of doors (which was her usual way of getting rid of *them*), they might be able to do comfortably for themselves ; and she had done her very utmost to get all her daughters well married, and had succeeded so cleverly that at present she had only three or four unmarried ones on hand, and of these one at this moment was on the point of making a most desirable match.

This daughter was called Blue-eyes, and she was one of the prettiest little mice you ever saw, with a slim, graceful figure, and a most delicate slate-coloured complexion ; and the mouse to whom she was to be married—who was a very handsome and charming

young mouse indeed,—was called Long-tail. It was quite a love-match, and a most delightful one in every way; 'except, my dear, that I wish you had both been a little older,' the wise old mother would often say with a sigh, 'for this is an age when no mouse can live long without exercising the greatest prudence and caution, and the number of sons and daughters that I have lost already, simply by their falling into mischief when my back has been turned, is really more than I can count. Now, when you and Long-tail begin your house-keeping—'

And then the mother-mouse would deliberately sit down and proceed to give Blue-eyes a long and sensible lecture about all the things that she should do, and all the temptations that she should avoid; and the whole time pretty silly little Blue-eyes would be thinking to herself what fun she would have when she and Long-tail were married, and what a merry life they would lead, frisking here and there, and seeing the world in a way that her cross old mother had never let her do. It was quite clear that Blue-eyes never listened to a word her mother said, so no wonder that the poor old mouse should sometimes sit down quite worn out and hopeless, after she had been having some extra piece of trouble with these giddy children of hers, and exclaim, from the very bottom of her heart—'Oh dear me, nobody who has never tried it can *imagine* what it is to be the mother of a family like mine!'

Still, on the whole, she was a brave and wise old mouse, and it would have been well for Blue-eyes and Long-tail if they had been at all like her. But they were not like her in the very least, for a giddier pair of pretty young creatures you never set eyes on, with no more notion about how to take care of themselves, and to set up housekeeping in a proper way after they got married—than *you* would have, Children, [said Cousin Trix.] Indeed, not only had they no notions about house-keeping, but they had no notions even about a house itself, let alone the keeping of it; and if it had not been that the good old mother trudged out night after night, and patiently examined all the untenanted houses in the neighbourhood (untenanted, I mean, by *mice*), until she met with one that she thought just the thing to suit them, the silly young creatures, I really believe, would just have got married, and never have given a thought to what was to become of them next.

However, by the help of the mother-mouse they did succeed in getting a most excellent establishment to begin with. It was in an almost new house, where no mouse had ever lived before,—a large house, where there was a great deal going on, and where (which, of course, with such thoughtless young things was a matter of the greatest importance) no wicked cat was kept. The people kept birds instead, and everybody was so fond of the birds, some of which were tame ones, who

were allowed at times to hop about the rooms, that they would not have allowed a cat to cross the threshold on any consideration,—a fact which filled Blue-eyes and Long-tail with the utmost delight, and made them feel confident that they were about to enter a most amiable and superior family.

The mother-mouse had strongly advised them to take up their quarters, in the first instance, in the upper part of the house, where there was a large and most charming lumber-garret quite at their service ; and, as they had no objection to do this, they established themselves here immediately after their marriage, in high spirits, and in the course of a day or two had gnawed themselves a nice little hole, in and out of which they could slip in a moment, in a pleasant dark corner under the wainscot, and had made a delightful discovery of a curious little tightly sewed-up sack of bran, which they found to be excellent eating,—and in all respects, in fact, had made themselves quite comfortable and at home.

Never, indeed, were there two happier young mice. The mother had bidden them goodbye with a sigh of great relief, and an affectionate hope (such as she never failed to express to all her children when finally parting from them) that they might not come to a bad end ; and now Long-tail and Blue-eyes were left to themselves, with all the world before them, as they believed, and not a creature left to control or thwart or give good

advice to them,—which of course they thought was a most delightful state of things. ‘For really the way in which mamma has always kept us girls at home has been something perfectly ridiculous,’ silly little Blue-eyes said to her husband, with a shrug of her shoulders, as soon as ever the old mouse had turned her back. ‘I am sure up to the very last moment she has treated me just as if I hadn’t a head of my own,—*me*, a married mouse! It has been quite absurd!’

‘Well, I shouldn’t myself like to say anything severe,’ replied Long-tail patronizingly, ‘for I feel certain she always means well, but anything more tiresome to a mouse of spirit than the way in which she goes pressing on, it would be impossible to conceive.’

‘Just as if there was no wisdom in the world except her own!’ exclaimed Blue-eyes.

‘And as if nobody had ever found out anything since *she* was young!’ returned Long-tail.

‘Perfectly ridiculous!’ said Blue-eyes.

‘It is really amazing to see how people can think so much of their own opinions,’ cried Long-tail. ‘Live and learn: that is my motto. Try to see life, and gather wisdom from *that*. The more we see of the world the more experience we shall gain,’ exclaimed Long-tail loftily; for Long-tail, you will perceive, was a very grand young mouse, and indulged now and then in very fine talk indeed (after the fashion of many young creatures, whether mice or not), especially since

he had known Blue-eyes, who admired that sort of thing exceedingly.

She was quite delighted now, of course, with the sentiments he had expressed.

‘Ah, how beautifully you speak!’ she exclaimed with ecstasy. ‘Yes, I feel certain that the more we see of the world the better. It will enlarge our ideas so,—won’t it, Long-tail?’

‘Not a doubt of it,’ replied Long-tail.

‘It will make us such superior mice.’

‘I know *one* of us who is a superior mouse already,’ said Long-tail gallantly, and looked at Blue-eyes with a most fascinating air.

Upon which, of course, Blue-eyes blushed becomingly, and said in the prettiest way in the world, that she was sure he flattered her,—which he certainly did (though I am afraid she did not think so herself in her heart), for a sillier little goose than she was,—or than they both were for that matter,—it would not have been easy to find.

However, even the silliest creatures can be happy in their own way, and undoubtedly Long-tail and Blue-eyes were as happy a pair of light-hearted mice as ever lived for the first week after they came to their new house. What games they had in the big garret! How they chased one another across the floor, and played at hide-and-seek amongst the lumber, and scuttled about behind the wainscot, and made wonderful discoveries of every kind!

'Ah, Long-tail, this *is* life!' Blue-eyes would exclaim, panting and breathless after some delightful race.

'Well, yes, I flatter myself that we know how to enjoy ourselves,' Long-tail would answer complacently; 'though even this, dear Blue-eyes, is only the beginning of the pleasures that I hope to introduce you to. I *may* be young,' Long-tail would say condescendingly,—not exactly admitting the fact, but gracefully acknowledging it as a possibility—'I *may* be young in months, but I think I may say I know something of the world, my love.'

Indeed, they mere merry times, there was no doubt of it; they were the merriest and happiest times by a good deal that Long-tail and Blue-eyes had ever spent; and for my own part I don't wonder in the least that, silly and thoughtless as they were to begin with, they should grow still sillier and more thoughtless as one prosperous day followed another, until by the time that a week had ended they should almost believe that there was no such thing as danger in the world, nor any need of vigilance and prudence on their parts, and should treat all the wise maxims of the good old mother-mouse with the most open ridicule and contempt. She was a well-meaning mouse, they always continued to allow, but as to the narrowness of her views on every subject, it was quite pitiable, they said. Life, they declared, was the easiest thing imaginable, and the world the very pleasantest and safest place that could be conceived.

Of course, holding these views, it was not likely that

they would long remain content with the cautious kind of life that the mother-mouse had advised. They both pronounced the garret, indeed, to be a most delightful place; but by the time they had scampered about it for seven or eight days they began to get just the least bit tired of it, and to think that it would be a nice piece of fun to find out something new. Why now, for instance, should they not make a little expedition down stairs some morning? The old mother-mouse, to be sure, had warned them never on any account to dream of doing such a thing; but then,—‘Really,’ Blue-eyes said, ‘we can’t be bound to attend to all *mamma’s* advice, or a pretty dull life we should lead. What harm could there possibly be in our putting our heads for a few minutes into one or two of the other rooms? For my own part, indeed, I think it is only right that we should try to make some personal acquaintance with a family with whom we have become so closely connected.’

‘You speak most admirably!’ Long-tail replied. ‘To show indifference to the members of this household would prove us most ungrateful. I really wonder this did not strike me before. My advice is now that not another moment should be lost. Let us make for the floor below this at once!’

And he was so eager to set about it that he began to lead the way instantly to the door.

This was beginning business a little faster, however, *than* Blue-eyes was quite prepared for. Being only a

lady-mouse, you see, she was not altogether of so adventurous and foolhardy a nature as Long-tail, and I must confess that the eagerness he showed to rush upon this new expedition made her heart knock against her side. *Talking* was one thing, but *acting* was quite another affair, poor little Blue-eyes began to think.

However, she was ashamed to say that she was frightened, so, as Long-tail was posting towards the door, she merely cried out hurriedly—

‘One moment, dear Long-tail! Let me take your arm; my breath this morning seems—seems a little—a little short. I shall be ready instantly. You don’t think, do you, Long-tail,’ and then she looked a little wildly into his eyes, ‘that there can be any—any possible doubt about—the cat?’

‘My love,’ replied Long-tail, almost severely, ‘if I thought that there was any, do you not feel that *I* should be the last mouse in the world to sanction such an expedition as this? I might face danger recklessly for *myself*,’ said Long-tail, quite in heroics; ‘but do you think that I would wilfully lead *you* into it?’ and he laid his hand on hers, and looked into her face with an expression of such sorrowful and tender reproach that little Blue-eyes was quite overcome, and had to take out her handkerchief and wipe her eyes half-a-dozen times before she could so much as utter another word.

‘Cousin Trix,’ said Mabel softly, interrupting the

story for a moment, 'where did the little mice keep their handkerchiefs?'

'Generally in their left ears, my dear,' Cousin Trix replied.

Of course this delayed them for a little while, [Cousin Trix went on,] for they had to wait until Blue-eyes had composed herself and recovered her spirits, which it took her about five minutes to do. By the end of that time, however, she declared herself quite well again, and not a bit frightened, and ready for anything, so they once more made a fresh start for the door, and after listening for a moment or two on the outside landing, to make sure that all was quiet, away they skipped downstairs.

They soon got down to the bottom of the first flight of stairs, and found themselves in a passage from which a number of doors led. Provokingly enough, however, every one of these was closed.

'This is awkward,' said Long-tail, as they paused to take breath at the foot of the last step.

'*Very* awkward,' echoed Blue-eyes, looking blankly all round her.

'And very singular too,' continued Long-tail reflectively.

'Oh, as to its being singular, I know nothing about that. I only know that it's excessively annoying,' said Blue-eyes, a little sharply.

'One of the doors may be opened presently, if we wait,' urged Long-tail consolingly.

'Well, I call it poor fun to do nothing but sit still and wait,' replied Blue-eyes, tossing her head.

For the fact was that Blue-eyes had had her own way so completely and had been made so much of since she had been married, that she was beginning already to get quite unable to bear the least thing going cross.

'Oh, for that matter, we can easily go up-stairs again,' said Long-tail, a little hurt.

'But I don't *want* to go up-stairs again,' answered Blue-eyes snappishly.

'Well, we can go *down*-stairs,' said Long-tail.

'Why *don't* you go down-stairs then?' retorted Blue-eyes, as sharp as a needle.

Upon which Long-tail, quite meekly (for he saw that her temper was a little upset), was just on the point of leading the way towards the next flight of stairs, when all at once the door that was nearest to them opened in such a sudden way that Blue-eyes nearly screamed.

It was a door leading into a nice comfortable room, warm and bright and pleasant, and the person who had opened it was a nice little boy, who came out by it, and ran away along the passage, leaving it half-open behind him.

This was the very thing that Long-tail and Blue-Eyes wanted.

'How lucky we are! Follow close behind me.

Really, this is a most delightful house!’ exclaimed Long-tail, and then, one after the other, and holding their breath, they softly slipped through the open door into the room, and found themselves suddenly in the presence of three little girls, who were all sitting round a table in the middle of the room, busily doing something there with books and slates.

‘Here’s a dark corner,’ whispered Long-tail. ‘Slip in here beside me ; and if you think anybody sees you, you know, shut your eyes.—Ah, there they are closing the door! Well, we’re in for it now, any way.’

‘Ye—es, we’re in for it now,’ echoed Blue-eyes, more than half in a fright.

‘I wonder what they would think if they knew we were here,’ said Long-tail, a little nervously.

‘Oh dear me, Long-tail, I hope they won’t find out!’ cried Blue-eyes, all in a tremble.

‘My love, do you feel cold?’ asked Long-tail, looking at her anxiously.

‘Cold! just feel my back. I wish I *was* cold!’ cried poor little Blue-eyes piteously ; and indeed when Long-tail touched her back, as she wished, he found it as hot as fire. She was evidently quite in a fever.

This was rather awkward, for they had gone so far now, you see, that there was no retreat for them ; and if Blue-eyes were to turn ill it was clear that their position would be embarrassing. Most fortunately, however, just as Long-tail was beginning to feel his own

back grow hot at the thought of what might possibly be about to befall them, he was so lucky as to make a most agreeable discovery.

‘My nose may deceive me, Blue-eyes,’ he said suddenly, ‘but surely I smell something eatable in the air.’

‘Something eatable, do you, dear Long-tail!’ cried Blue-eyes. ‘Where?—where? Let me find it out! Ah, you are right! Dear me, this is delicious!’ exclaimed Blue-eyes, making a swift little run forward, and beginning to pick up some grains of bird-seed from the floor with all her might.

The seed was lying on the carpet in a nice shady place, and for two or three minutes both Blue-eyes and Long-tail were so busy snapping it up that they were not able to utter another word. By the time they had eaten it all they had wonderfully recovered their spirits, and Blue-eyes’ courage was quite restored.

‘There is certainly nothing so refreshing as a meal,’ she said, with a little sigh of content, as they ran back again to their first place. ‘I find I must have been extremely hungry just now, for really before we found these nice grains I felt exceedingly queer.’

‘I am sure you *looked* queer,’ Long-tail replied. ‘My own opinion is that we have been keeping too much to one form of diet of late. The system needs change. These seeds have certainly been most acceptable. It really almost looks,’ said Long-tail thoughtfully, ‘as if they had been placed here on purpose for us.’

‘I was this moment thinking the very same thing!’ exclaimed Blue-eyes.

‘Nobody would have put seed down on the ground for a *bird* to eat, you know,’ cried Long-tail.

‘Quite out of the question to suppose that they would,’ answered Blue-eyes contemptuously.

‘Birds fly in the air: all the world knows that,’ said Long-tail with an air of scorn.

‘Or live in cages. I’ve seen dozens of them,’ replied Blue-eyes.

‘Therefore these grains couldn’t possibly have been meant for *them*,’ said Long-tail conclusively.

‘Nor yet for cats; because cats, I have been assured, never touch such things,’ said Blue-eyes earnestly.

‘Cats! oh, pooh! *They* are out of the question altogether,’ cried Long-tail. ‘There are *no* cats here, you know.’

‘Well—no; I believe not: I *hope* not,’ said Blue-eyes, with a quiver running down her spine.

‘And as for children like these before us,—why, the meal we have just enjoyed could never have been meant for such monstrous creatures as those,’ said Long-tail.

‘Or if it had, you know, they would have eaten it,’ responded Blue-eyes.

‘Therefore it must have been placed there for some one else,’ said Long-tail with decision.

‘And who else *is* there that it could have been placed for but us?’ asked Blue-eyes.

'The evidence seems to *me* conclusive,' said Long-tail, with an air of almost having been convinced against his will.

'*Perfectly* conclusive to *my* mind,' replied Blue-eyes, with an air of exquisite simplicity and frankness.

And then, as they both agreed so delightfully together, of course they felt no more doubt about it.

'They must have expected us,' said Long-tail thoughtfully.

'That is quite clear,' replied Blue-eyes.

'Perhaps, for what we know, they may have been looking for us for days,' said Long-tail.

'I think it is the most likely thing in the world,' agreed Blue-eyes.

'And may have laid out a breakfast for us day after day. I wish we had known it sooner,' said Long-tail.

'I am sure I wish we had, with all my heart!' exclaimed Blue-eyes.

'We ought to endeavour to show our sense of such attention,' said Long-tail.

'Well, I should be delighted, if I knew how,' answered Blue-eyes.

'I think we should show ourselves,' said Long-tail with solemnity.

'Oh dear me! do you, Long-tail?' inquired Blue-eyes, all in a flutter.

'I should advise it,—*strongly*,' said Long-tail, with emphasis.

‘Well, but suppose they shouldn’t like it?’ suggested Blue-eyes faintly.

‘How could they possibly *dislike* it?’ demanded Long-tail haughtily. ‘Our air and shape, I flatter myself, Blue-eyes, are scarcely such as to inspire feelings of aversion.’

‘Well, that’s true,’ said Blue-eyes, rather comforted. ‘And I am sure *I* should be most anxious to do whatever was right; so if you think they would be gratified—’

‘I have not a doubt of it!’ cried Long-tail.

‘And would you advise our stepping out at once? Oh dear! I don’t think I shall appear to advantage. How do I look, Long-tail?’ asked Blue-eyes anxiously.

‘Charmingly, my love!’ exclaimed Long-tail, in a tone of enthusiasm. ‘A slightly increased appearance of ease in the position of your legs would be an improvement, perhaps, if you could accomplish it—’

‘Oh, but I’m *not* at ease, so how in the world can I put my legs as if I were?’ interrupted poor Blue-eyes piteously. ‘Is my face all right, Long-tail?’

‘Well—*moderately* right,’ answered Long-tail, rather doubtfully. ‘There is something a little singular in the expression, I think. If you could contrive to stop your mouth from twitching, my dear, and to keep your eyes from looking so particularly wild—Well—yes, that’s a trifle better,’ said Long-tail, anxious to make the best of it, though the truth was it was scarcely any better

at all, for a more terrified-looking little mouse than Blue-eyes was at this moment it would not have been easy to find. She had shrunk all up till she was just like a little grey ball, with her legs and her tail all tucked under her, as if they had been tied together, and her poor little face quite pinched and sharp with fright.

‘Oh, Long-tail, my heart’s going pit-a-pat!’ she said. ‘You don’t think—do you—that you would like to—to show yourself—without me?’

‘It would seem singular, a little, I think,’ answered Long-tail, rather taken aback.

‘But I would come presently, you know,—if you wouldn’t mind just going first,’ cried Blue-eyes eagerly.

‘Oh, well, I don’t mind going first, if you would like it,’ said Long-tail, with an appearance of perfect indifference, though, in fact, as he spoke his own heart was beating curiously fast. ‘First or last, it’s all one to me.’ And with that he stepped forward quite heroically, and gave a run that brought him out into the very middle of the floor. As soon as he had got there, of course, he wondered immensely (as well as he could wonder anything for terror) what would happen next, and you may be sure that he felt a good deal amazed (as Blue-eyes also did, eagerly peeping out at him from the wall) that nothing happened of any kind at all. The three little girls were all so busy with their lessons that not one of them raised her head, or seemed to have the least idea that he was in the room. He ran here

and there, but not the slightest notice did anybody take of him, and so at last he scudded back to where Blue-eyes was waiting for him, a little out of breath, to be sure, and rather surprised, but still, on the whole, in delightful spirits.

‘There, my dear, you see it’s the simplest thing in the world!’ he exclaimed: ‘nothing to make even a new-born mouse afraid. I feel convinced, from what I have seen just now, that we may consider the whole house at our command. A little more appearance of courtesy on the part of these young people would have been gratifying, perhaps, but probably they are deferring any civilities they may wish to pay us until they see us both together. Do you feel able to accompany me in a little run now, my love?’

Well, Blue-eyes did not quite know, but she was ready to try, she said; and so, though she still looked rather pale about the lips, and less at ease by a good deal in her way of walking than usual, after a few moments more she did make the attempt. She ran a very little way forward, and then a little bit back, and then took another little run forward, and another little run back, and so by degrees, after a good deal of time, she made her way nearly into the centre of the floor. Of course, at every little run she took she watched the three children sitting round the table with all her eyes; but just as it had been when Long-tail was by himself so it was now: they all sat quite still, and did not

seem to have so much as the least idea in the world that any mouse whatever was in the place.

‘It’s singular!’ said Long-tail, when, after scudding about for two or three minutes, they retired once more to their corner to take breath.

‘*Very* singular; and not quite civil,’ answered Blue-eyes a little sharply, for though she would have been terrified if the children *had* looked round and seen her, she was such a vain little mouse that she felt quite hurt at having been overlooked.

‘Well—no; not civil according to *our* notions; but we must make allowances, my love,’ said Long-tail, in a tone of condescension. ‘I believe that young human beings are often singularly ill-bred. They *mean* no disrespect, I think.’

‘I should like to feel a little more sure of that,’ replied Blue-eyes, tossing her head.

‘At any rate they leave us at perfect liberty: that is agreeable,’ said Long-tail.

‘Well—yes; that is agreeable enough, I confess,’ Blue-eyes agreed.

‘What do you say to another run? I feel rather disposed for one,’ said Long-tail.

‘Oh yes; I think we’ll have another run,’ replied Blue-eyes.

And then off they set.

They ran quite boldly this time straight into the middle of the room, and then backwards and forwards, here

and there, quite merrily, and at their ease. There was nothing in the world to be afraid of, they said to one another; and really it was very fine fun. In more than one place they came upon some delicious crumbs, sprinkled upon the carpet, no doubt expressly for them, and these they ate up with the greatest satisfaction, for they had both excellent appetites. Altogether, in fact, they were enjoying themselves extremely, and had more than half forgotten all about the children, when, all in a moment, there came the most dreadful scream that they had ever heard in their lives, and before they could imagine what in the world had happened, one of the little girls had sprung up on a chair, and another had leapt up on the table, and the third had darted to the sofa, and everybody was crying out together, and,—what was more extraordinary and alarming than all the rest,—they were all three staring and pointing at Blue-eyes and Long-tail, as if they had never seen a mouse before in their lives.

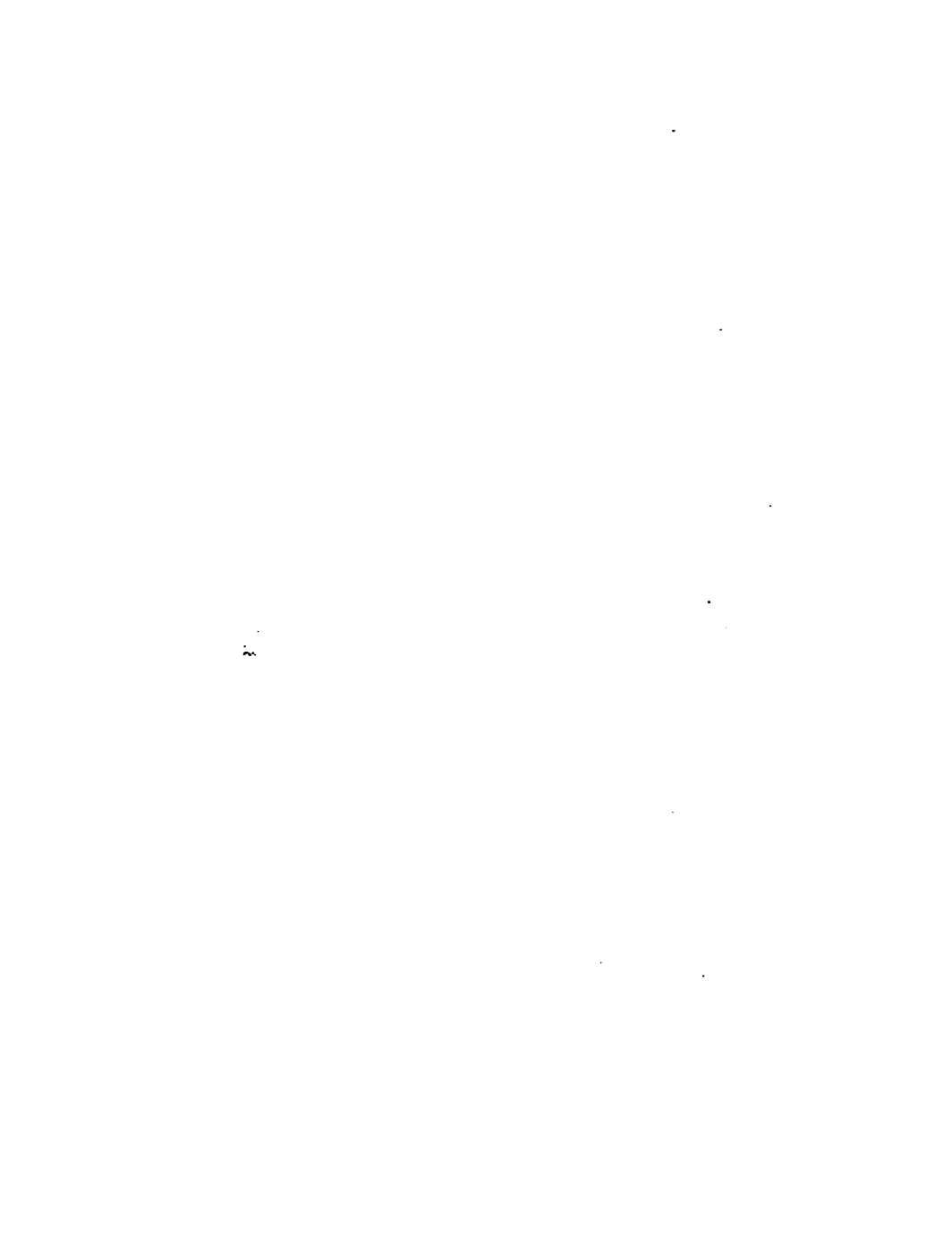
You may fancy, if you can, how Long-tail and Blue-eyes felt! For a moment or two they were so paralysed with terror that they couldn't move a step, and Blue-eyes nearly fainted on the spot; and then how they got again to their corner they never knew, for they just scudded back to it along the floor, pell-mell, without ever taking breath.

Yet, frightened as *they* were, they did not seem to be a bit less frightened than the three children, who, I



BLUE-EYES AND LONG-TAIL IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

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think, [said Cousin Trix,] were the very silliest little children I ever knew, for as long as Blue-eyes and Long-tail remained in sight they stood up on their different perches and screamed, and as soon as the little mice had run back to their corner they all bolted out of the room as if they had been shot.

It was altogether a most amazing proceeding; and Blue-eyes and Long-tail, as soon as they had got over their first alarm, were completely bewildered by it.

‘What in the world do you think they mean?’ poor little Blue-eyes asked, almost gasping for breath, as soon as ever she was able to speak, and had seen that all her limbs were safe.

‘I can’t so much as conceive!’ replied Long-tail, quite aghast with surprise.

‘They certainly saw us,’ said Blue-eyes reflectively.

‘Oh, dear, yes, they *saw* us, undoubtedly,’ replied Long-tail.

‘Then what could possibly have made them run away?’ cried Blue-eyes.

‘I can’t imagine,—unless they were afraid,’ answered Long-tail.

‘Afraid of *us*!’ exclaimed Blue-eyes.

‘There was certainly nothing else to be afraid of,’ said Long-tail.

‘Well, that’s true!’ Blue-eyes agreed. And then they both fell into deep thought.

‘I have heard before now that we exercise a powerful

influence over some people,' said Long-tail, after some moments of grave silence.

'It certainly *looks* as if we did,' replied Blue-eyes rather complacently.

'Small comparatively as we are, these human beings fear us. Foolish creatures!' Long-tail said contemptuously, 'we wouldn't harm them.'

'Oh dear no, I'm sure we never should think of such a thing,' exclaimed Blue-eyes.

'We must try to show the silly things that we bear them no ill-will,' said Long-tail condescendingly.

'I don't see how we are to show them that or anything else now they've run away,' replied Blue-eyes.

'But they will return again, I hope,' said Long-tail.

'Well, I hope they may,' answered Blue-eyes (but she gave rather a shiver as she said it).

'I am afraid you are exhausted, my love,' said Long-tail tenderly.

'My nerves certainly feel a little shaken,' replied Blue-eyes, with a languishing air. 'After what we have gone through, I think, dear Long-tail, I should enjoy an hour or two's repose.'

'By all means! Will you sleep here?' inquired Long-tail. 'We may consider this room now, I have no doubt, as entirely at our disposal.'

'Ah, very likely; but I think I should prefer on the whole to retire up-stairs,' replied Blue-eyes, with considerable vivacity.

'As you please. We can easily return here at any moment,' said Long-tail.

'Oh dear, yes, quite easily,' replied Blue-eyes quickly.

And then they came out of their corner,—it must be confessed a little cautiously, and looked all round them, listening the while.

'They probably won't come back to-day. Poor creatures, it really amuses me to think how terrified they were!' I feel quite impatient to reassure them,' cried Long-tail, with enthusiasm.

'Ah, so do I, I'm sure,' said Blue-eyes with indifference, and listening with all her ears.

'We will return the first thing in the morning,' said Long-tail.

'Well, so that we get back to the garret now, you may do anything you like,' answered Blue-eyes; and with that she whisked out of the room, and made a leap up-stairs, and hardly drew breath again till she found herself safe at the attic-door.

The excitement and agitation of the morning, you see, [said Cousin Trix,] had shaken her a good deal; but I am glad to say that an excellent sleep, into which she at once fell, refreshed her extremely, and when she awoke again at nightfall, she had quite lost her nervousness, and was as lively again, and as ready for new adventures as Long-tail himself.

They both agreed that as soon as ever morning came they would pay a second visit to the schoolroom, and,

in fact, no sooner had it begun to get light, than, quite unable to restrain themselves any longer, with one consent they set off. They skipped once more with light hearts down the stairs, and reached the landing in a few moments ; then, finding the schoolroom door standing wide open, they ran into the room as merry as crickets.

But to their disappointment they found it quite empty ; not one of the little girls or anybody else was there (for the truth was, though Blue-eyes and Long-tail had no idea of that, it was so early in the morning that not a creature in the house was yet up).

‘Why, where in the world can they be!’ cried Blue-eyes, stopping suddenly short, and staring all around.

‘It’s very singular! They certainly are not *here*,’ replied Long-tail, quite taken aback.

And then, though they didn’t say so, they both felt that this was a little flat.

‘They must have been too frightened to return,’ exclaimed Long-tail contemptuously.

‘How absurd!’ cried Blue-eyes.

‘Quite ludicrous!’ replied Long-tail.

‘Well, the loss is *theirs*, any way,’ said Blue-eyes, a little snappishly.

‘Most unquestionably, my love ; but I only hope they haven’t forgotten our breakfast,’ answered Long-tail, sharply. And then, not quite in the very best temper, they began to look about them, and to snuff with their eager little noses here and there.

They had been at this work only a few moments when they were rewarded in a most delightful way.

'There seems to me a singularly agreeable odour somewhere,' exclaimed Blue-eyes suddenly, in a tone of great excitement.

'I was on the very point of making the same remark myself,' returned Long-tail, quite agitated.

'It comes from this direction, I think,' cried Blue-eyes. 'Oh dear me, it quite makes my mouth water. Do you see anything, Long-tail ?

'I see a—a sort of little box,' said Long-tail doubtfully.

'Oh, it can't possibly come from any little box,' exclaimed Blue-eyes contemptuously, and went busily poking her nose somewhere else.

But Long-tail ran close up to the little box, and quietly peeped in.

It was a curious box, with wire-work all round it, and a little hole at the top ; and when Long-tail looked inside it, what do you think he saw ? He saw the most delicious piece of toasted cheese that ever any mouse set eyes on ! a large piece of toasted cheese, which it was quite clear had been put there for him and Blue-eyes to eat, for the little hole at the top of the box was the very exact size that was needed to allow of a mouse creeping in.

He was so moved by the discovery of this delicious banquet that for a few moments he was quite overcome.

‘Oh Blue-eyes! Blue-eyes!’ he called out as soon as he could speak; and when Blue-eyes came running up, she found him actually with the tears in his eyes.

‘I have found it! Look what they have provided for us!’ he cried. ‘Oh Blue-eyes, what appreciation of our worth this shows! what wisdom and delicate kindness!’

‘Well, it certainly is very nice,’ said Blue-eyes; ‘though why they should have taken so much trouble about it,’ she added, looking rather amazed, ‘I can’t conceive, when it would have done just as well to put the cheese down upon the floor.’

‘What! and have left it exposed to all the world?’ exclaimed Long-tail, in a tone of reproachful surprise. ‘It is possible, Blue-eyes, that you do not perceive how it is sheltered on all sides by these wires, in order that it may be preserved untouched, while this little hole is left at the top to enable us, and us only, to creep in?’

And with that, to prove how excellent the arrangement was, Long-tail with great dignity mounted the box, and slipped in, head foremost, through the little hole; and in another moment was eating away at the cheese with all his might.

Of course, as soon as she saw this, Blue-eyes showed herself in a prodigious hurry to follow him.

‘I’m coming too! Stand a little out of the way, Long-tail!’ she called out. ‘This place is most inconveniently small.’ And she was just in the act of slipping

in after him, when, at that very moment, there came a sudden noise of steps and voices.

Poor little Blue-eyes! The horrid sound in an instant took all her wits away. 'Oh, what shall I do?' she had only time to call out; and then, losing head completely—for she was a nervous creature—instead of following Long-tail into the box, she turned wildly round, and scudded across the floor, and hid herself in the very darkest corner she could find, with her poor little heart in her mouth, and all her legs trembling beneath her. Of course the very next instant she thought to herself, 'Oh, why didn't I slip in beside Long-tail!' But it was too late to wish that she had done it then.

It was several of the children and some grown-up person that she had heard coming into the room, and you may imagine what little Blue-eyes felt when, peeping out from the hole to which she had scampered, she saw them, as soon as they had entered, go straight up to the little box in which Long-tail was sitting nibbling his cheese, and take it up from the floor. 'Oh, Long-tail, what are they going to do with you?' she cried out to herself at this sight, and wrung her hands. And well indeed might she wring them, for matters had come to a sad pass now with poor Long-tail.

They took the little box up in their hands, and the children all stood round it, talking and calling out, and pointing and staring at Long-tail, who, brave little mouse though he was, had pretty quickly, you may be

sure, left off his pleasant meal, and was staring at them in return, with his heart going pit-a-pat. Of course he tried with all his might to keep up his courage, and to persuade himself that these kind friends who had brought the box and the beautiful toasted cheese for him couldn't possibly mean to do him any harm (though they were certainly a little odd in their manner); but still the longer he looked at them, and the longer they looked at him, the more scared and terrified he got, and the more desperately he wished that he was only back once more with Blue-eyes in their own dear garret up-stairs.

'I'll make a bolt for it!' he thought to himself at last. 'I'm a capital runner, and even if they *should* try to catch me I think I shall be too quick for them. I can hide, too, most excellently, so that nothing short of a cat can find me. Yes—I'll bolt! Feeling so uncertain of their intentions as I do, that's certainly the wisest step that I can take.'

And no sooner had he formed this resolution than, screwing his courage to the sticking place, Long-tail made a gallant spring.

But, alas! for poor Long-tail. He had got *into* the box so easily: he had slipped through that nice little hole so neatly and quickly; yet now he could no more get out again than if he had been imprisoned within stone walls. What in the world could be the matter with the box? He gave his first leap, and got such a

blow that he tumbled down flat upon his back ; he gave a second, and a third, and a fourth, growing quite wild and desperate with terror, and he only hurt and bruised his poor little head and legs and sides. He was fast shut in prison : he couldn't get out. He sat down at last, quite still, in the bottom of the trap, and looked in the children's faces. They were not all looking at *him* then. One of them, a little thing, had begun to cry and had run away, and there were only two of them left to stare at him with their hard eyes.

It was all over with him ; he began to feel that. All over with him ! And one little hour ago how happy they had both been ! All these days how happy Blue-eyes and he had been together ; and now what would she do without him,—poor little mouse, up in the garret alone ? ‘Oh Blue-eyes !’ he cried hopelessly to himself ; ‘Oh little Blue-eyes !’

And all this time Blue-eyes sat crouching behind the wainscot, sobbing and wringing her hands.

‘I'll go after them wherever they go,’ she was whispering. ‘I'm a poor terrified timid little mouse, but I'll follow them wherever they take Long-tail. Oh, they are going to take him off now ! They are going to carry him away !’

And so indeed they were. They took him in his trap and carried him from the room : they took him along the passage, and down flight after flight of stairs, and at last they took him out into the court-yard ; and

all the way they went little Blue-eyes followed after them, slipping from stair to stair, and tumbling head-over-heels sometimes, because her legs were trembling so that they wouldn't carry her, but still never for a moment giving in or thinking of turning back. She ran behind them all the way, keeping close to the walls and in whatever place it was darkest ; and when they came into the yard at last, and set the trap down on the flags, she hid herself so near to it, behind a stone, that she could quite well see Long-tail as he sat crouched together, with his poor wild terrified eyes.

But, now that she had got here, what next was to be done? She remembered all the frightful stories she had ever heard, and her poor little silly heart, grown sad and grave at last, told her only too plainly what would be Long-tail's fate. They would take him out of his cage, and put him to death ; and *she*—oh, would she never be able to speak so much as another word to him again, but have to sit still behind her stone and see him die?

Well—no ; it was not *quite* so bad as that. She might have to see him die, but I am sure you will be glad to hear, Children, [said Cousin Trix,] that the two poor little mice were able, before it came to the last, to bid one another good-bye. For when they had got Long-tail out into the yard, for some reason or other they seemed in no particular hurry to make an end of him. Perhaps the proper person to execute him was not there,

or perhaps the household were all hungry and wanted their breakfast: whatever might have been the reason, the fact was that they set Long-tail down upon the flags, and then, after one or two of them had come and looked at him very disrespectfully, and made what Blue-eyes guessed from their tone to be some very slighting remarks upon him, they all went out of the yard and left him to himself.

And then, you may be sure (though her heart was fairly in her mouth with terror), little Blue-eyes came rushing out of her hiding-place, and ran up to the side of the trap.

'Oh Long-tail!' cried little Blue-eyes, gasping. And Long-tail, who had never expected to see her again in this world, gave such a wild 'cheep!' as she appeared, that you might have heard him a dozen yards off.

'Oh Blue-eyes! can you do anything for me? Have you come to help me? Oh Blue-eyes!' cried poor Long-tail in an agony, 'can't you get me out?'

And at that Blue-eyes burst out crying, for she knew that the only thing she could do would be to gnaw through the wood of the trap, and she was quite sure that they would never give her time for that. So she fell to crying with all her might, and Long-tail looked at her in his despair, till his own tears came so fast that he could hardly see her face; and then they stretched out their arms to one another through the bars, and put their little wet cheeks side by side; and

they knew that they could do nothing for one another, but that Blue-eyes must be left alone, and that Long-tail must die.

'We thought that we were wiser than other mice,' said Long-tail sorrowfully, when they had cried till they could almost cry no more.

'But we were so young,' answered poor little Blue-eyes.

'Yes, we were young enough ; but we were filled with conceit,' said Long-tail.

'I don't think *you* were ever half so conceited as *I* was,' cried Blue-eyes.

'My conceit has done for me, at any rate,' replied Long-tail. 'I shall never trouble you any more, Blue-eyes.'

And with that he gave her such a piteous look that it was almost more than little Blue-eyes knew how to bear.

'Oh, Long-tail, we were so happy together!' she cried, though she could hardly speak.

'We hadn't a care in the world,' said Long-tail.

'Not the shadow of a care,' replied Blue-eyes.

'Such freedom as we enjoyed!' said Long-tail.

'Such a garret as we had to play in!' cried Blue-eyes.

'Such abundance of food!' said Long-tail.

'There was a little want of variety in the food,' suggested Blue-eyes.

'There was,' said Long-tail mildly. 'It was dry too.'

'It was *singularly* dry,' replied Blue-eyes.

'Yet that was but a small evil. In point of *quantity* it left nothing to be desired,' said Long-tail.

'Oh no ; such as it was there was plenty of it,' replied Blue-eyes.

'What more should mice have desired ? But we have lived and learnt,' said Long-tail solemnly.

'Yes ; and now that we have learnt, it is too late,' cried Blue-eyes, with another burst of tears.

'Oh, Blue-eyes !' cried Long-tail.

'Oh, Long-tail !' cried Blue-eyes.

And then they looked in one another's face till their hearts were like to break.

'Let us say good-bye to one another,' said Long-tail in a broken voice. And poor little Blue-eyes tried to repeat 'Good-bye !' and then they kissed one another through the bars. And after that they hardly spoke any more, but just sat cowering up close together, hand in hand, till at last there came the noise of an opening door ; and then they started apart, and Long-tail cried out, 'Oh fly, Blue-eyes ! fly !' There was only time for him to say that, and for them to give one last look at one another ; and then she rushed behind her stone once more ; and she and Long-tail thought that they should never see each other again in this world.

The door had opened, and several people had come

out into the yard. The little child who had cried and run away while Long-tail was struggling in the trap was one of them, and besides him there were two more of the children, and a big tall man ; and the little child ran along by the man's side, talking very eagerly, till they came close to the trap, when the man stopped and took it up in his hand.

And now Long-tail believed that his last moment had come, and he gave a great gasp and shut his eyes tight.

'I won't open them any more : I'll sit quite still until I die,' he said to himself. 'Oh little Blue-eyes, little Blue-eyes, good-bye !' And he thought it would all be over in a moment more.

But, instead of that—when that moment had come and gone,—Children, what do you think little Blue-eyes saw as she peeped out from behind her stone ?

Not Long-tail being put to death, but,—oh, could she believe her eyes, or was she going mad for joy ! —the trap-door open and the little child clapping his hands, and all of them standing back to let Long-tail go free.

To let him go free, and yet he never moved a step ! 'Long-tail ! Long-tail !' she cried out. But still he sat quite still. And then the little mouse forgot everything else in the world,—all danger and all fear,—and ran forward in the face of all the people to the trap-door.

That roused him at last. He opened his tight-closed lids, and saw—not death, but little Blue-eyes !

‘ Ah, but bring it to a proper end, Cousin Trix !’ cried Daisy, as Cousin Trix, after these last words, gave signs of considering her story finished.

‘ But I ’m tired, Daisy, and I ’ve had enough of it, and you can make all the end for yourself,’ answered Cousin Trix.

‘ We want to know how they got away, though. Did they run fast, for their lives ?’ asked little Mabel.

‘ Well, they *need* not have run fast,’ Cousin Trix replied, ‘ because, you see, the kind people *intended* to spare Long-tail’s life ; but then they were anything but sure of that themselves, and so they certainly did run as fast as their poor little legs could go,—which, however, is not saying a great deal, for they had been so nearly paralysed with terror that it was as much as they could do to move at all. And then, poor little things, they had not the least idea where to go to.’

‘ So what did they do ?’ asked Roger.

‘ I suspect they had a hard time of it for a while,’ replied Cousin Trix. ‘ They found a hiding-place in the yard pretty soon ; but when they had once got into it they were so frightened that they did not dare to come out again ; and they stayed there for three whole long days, till they were nearly starved.’

‘Oh, poor little mice!’ cried Mabel. ‘And then, Cousin Trix?’

‘Well then, at last,’ said Cousin Trix, ‘they saw that something *must* be done ; and so one night, first Long-tail ventured out a little way, and then Blue-eyes crept a little bit after him, and, though they were in a terrible state of nervousness and agitation, I am glad to say that they succeeded in picking up a nice little meal, and that they both felt a good deal better when they had eaten it. And after that they gradually got up their courage, and recovered their flesh, till at last, after a good many days had passed, they came to the conclusion that they would risk everything in one grand attempt to find their way home. And so one evening, when the door into the house was standing open, and everything was quiet and dark, with beating hearts they stole out from their hiding-place, and never rested (though they had a terrible night of it,—losing their way, and thinking it was all over with them a dozen times or more) till, half dead with fright and joy, they found themselves when morning came once again at their own garret door.’

‘And then after that, Cousin Trix, were they wise little mice for all the rest of their lives?’ asked Queen Mab.

‘They were perfect models of wisdom, Mabel,’ Cousin Trix replied. ‘They grew a little bit wiser every day from that time forward, till their oldest friends would

hardly have known them again. As for their caution, you never saw anything like it! They never left the garret again as long as they lived, but grew old in it together, surrounded by their children to the tenth generation, and regarded by all their family and acquaintance with unbounded admiration and respect, as a pair of mice who had had an experience of life such as it is given to few to possess.'

'And did they never see the old mother-mouse again?' asked Daisy.

'Never, I am afraid,' replied Cousin Trix. 'Perhaps they wrote a letter to her to tell her what they had gone through, but I am a little doubtful even of that. Postal communication in those days was not what it is now; and indeed, to tell the truth, the mother-mouse had always so many sons and daughters at home to occupy her mind that she was in general only too glad to wash her hands for good of those she had once sent out into the world, and seldom retained so much as the faintest recollection of them for longer than a week after they had left the parental roof. So, probably, if Long-tail and Blue-eyes *had* written to her, they would only have had their trouble for nothing; for my own opinion is,' said Cousin Trix sorrowfully, 'that the mother-mouse would neither have understood their letter,—nor most likely have even opened it!'

Cousin Trix came up to the schoolroom rather early the next day. The children had not long finished their lessons, and were busily engaged in sweeping away the cobwebs that the severe labours of the morning always caused to gather over their young brains,—that is to say, they were making a most prodigious uproar, and doing their utmost to demolish the furniture, and break their own or one another's legs and arms.

They gave a loud whoop of triumph, like young savages, when Cousin Trix put in her head amongst them, and surrounded her in an instant, and dragged her forward as if she had been a captive taken in war.

'Hoorah!' I didn't think you'd be here for half-an-hour!' cried Hercules.

'All the worse for me. I wish I had stayed away,' said Cousin Trix.

'Oh, you're just as well here as anywhere else!' exclaimed Roger. 'I'm sure there's ever so much more fun up here than in the drawing-room.'

'Well, it's a different *kind* of fun at least,' said Cousin Trix dryly.

At this all the children laughed, for, of course, they knew quite well that if the grown-up people in the drawing-room were to conduct themselves in their hours of ease as *they* did up in the schoolroom, everybody who saw them would believe they had gone out of their minds.

'And yet how queer that is!' said Daisy, when the

laugh was over. 'I mean, how odd it is that we can do what grown-up people can't!' And Daisy spoke a little complacently.

'My dear, the inferior animals can do many things that the superior ones can't or don't,' coolly answered Cousin Trix.

'But *we* are not inferior animals,' retorted Daisy, looking indignant and hurt.

'In so far as you are not yet subject to law and order, I'm afraid you belong to that class, Daisy,' replied Cousin Trix.

'I don't know what you mean by law and order,' said Daisy, looking not over-pleased.

'I mean two very excellent things,' replied Cousin Trix, 'of which if you don't learn the value you will never be of much use in this world.'

'Well, I'm sure *I* don't know what they are,' said Daisy, and began to pout.

It was too bad of Cousin Trix to come in and spoil sport like this, Daisy was thinking to herself,—beginning to preach to them about nobody knew what. Daisy was sure that, for her own part, she wasn't a bit less orderly than the rest of them. She didn't know what Cousin Trix was going on about.

Cousin Trix seemed herself, however, to know quite well what she was going on about, and didn't look a bit put out when Daisy began to pout her lip, even though Hercules was looking full at her too, and

knitting his brows hard, as Hercules always did over a knotty point.

‘I know that law and order are good things,’ said Hercules, after a few moments’ meditation; ‘but I thought that rules and things like that were mostly made for children, and that when people grew up—’

‘They made rules for themselves, I suppose, Jack?—or lived without them?’ interposed Cousin Trix. ‘Well, my dear, as for people making laws for themselves, if everybody did that the world would soon be in a pretty pickle; and as for living without them, all I can tell you is this, that the older we grow, and the wiser we grow, the more laws do we need to guide us, and the more laws we have to obey. Don’t look forward to getting liberty as you grow up. You have more liberty now than you will ever have, or ever ought to have, in all your life again.’

At which cheerful prospect Jack opened his eyes, and looked anything but rejoiced or comfortable in his mind.

As he was considering the matter, however, and before he had begun to reply, Roger struck in. Roger’s face was full of incredulity and contempt.

‘I’m sure when I am a man I shall do what I like; every grown-up man does,’ said Roger, quite indignant.

‘Indeed? I wasn’t aware of it, my dear,’ replied Cousin Trix politely, and looked as if she was so anxious to hear Roger hold forth upon this point at

greater length, that he got quite embarrassed at the unusual attention, and lost the thread of his argument.

As soon as he was quenched in this way, Jack once more lifted up his voice.

‘But, Cousin Trix—’ he began abruptly, plunging his hands into his hair; and then, after accomplishing that exordium, with equal abruptness paused. Jack had got something in his head, but, as often happened with him, he couldn’t bring it out.

Seeing his difficulty, Cousin Trix did what she could to help him.

‘You are puzzled at what I have been saying, Jack,’ she said, more seriously than she had spoken yet; ‘and Roger and Daisy, I see, think that I don’t know what I am talking about. Well, as to that, I can only hope that Roger and Daisy are wrong. And if I have said anything that perplexes you, Children,’ Cousin Trix went on, ‘think over it a little by yourselves, and, for my own part, I believe you will come not only to understand it, but even to agree in it before long. For if you will use your common sense, you will soon see that there are many grander things in the world than what half the world understands by “liberty.” It is better to do other people’s will than to do your own; better for most people by a great deal to learn how to obey than how to rule. And again I say, Jack, that the wiser you grow and the older you grow, the more you will find yourself surrounded by laws that you must obey, or

bear, to your own hurt, the consequences of disobeying. And don't fret over that, or think yourself dishonoured by it, for no more honourable condition is possible in this world than the condition of noble servitude. You needn't open your eyes, Jack; I mean what I say; human laws and Divine laws, you must obey them both, or sink to the level of the beasts in the field and the fishes in the sea.

'And now, children, go and play,' said Cousin Trix abruptly, 'and I'll have a talk with Queen Mab. You are only inferior animals as yet, you know, and half-developed creatures, so there's nothing but lawlessness and folly to be looked for from you. Off with you, and break one another's heads, if you must, for the next half-hour.'

With which singular permission Cousin Trix went off to the fireside, and took little Mabel on her knees.

She and Mabel had a quiet talk together, while the other three (after they had recovered, which it took them some minutes to do, from the effects of Cousin Trix's unprovoked attack) returned once more to their mad pranks, and made the room ring with their shouts and cries. A fearful noise they made! (People talk a good deal sometimes, very prettily, you know, about how sweet and delightful a thing it is to watch a number of children at play. Well, tastes differ! but, certainly, if by *play* is understood high romps, Cousin Trix for one could never discover the loveliness of it.

But then Cousin Trix, as you see, was in some of her ways of thinking and looking at things very peculiar,—not to say quite strange.)

The uproar went on for fully the permitted half-hour. Then one by one the children came dropping in to the fireside, flushed and exhausted and out of breath.

‘Oh, I am so tired!’ said Daisy, and sunk down on a seat quite worn out. ‘I wish I had another girl to play with, for boys are so dreadfully rough.’

‘That’s a pretty joke!—when you’re just as rough as we are,’ retorted Roger upon this.

‘I’m *not* as rough as you are,’ replied Daisy, indignant, and a squabble was upon the very point of beginning when Cousin Trix interfered.

‘Now, Children, hold your tongues,’ she said. ‘As for which of you is better than the others it’s not worth disputing about, for you are all three as bad as so many wild colts; and for the present neither Queen Mab nor I are going to stand any more of you. So we’ll either go down-stairs, if you like, and then you can play what more pranks you please, or, if you are inclined to behave like rational creatures, we’ll stay here and I’ll tell you a story.’

‘Oh yes, Cousin Trix, do tell us a story,’ said Jack; and Daisy and Roger, being too tired to go on playing, voted willingly enough for a story too.

Cousin Trix, therefore, told them to take their places, and as soon as they had got seated she began.



THE DWARF.

PART I.



ONCE upon a time, [said Cousin Trix,] there was a King and Queen who had an only son. They were a very powerful King and Queen, and they ruled over a very great country, and they seemed to have everything in the world that they could desire, for they were very fond of one another, and their subjects loved them, and they were so rich that they wanted nothing that money could procure. But for all that they had one great trouble, for their only son was a dwarf.

When he was born they thought the Queen would almost have died for grief. It had been the desire of her heart to have a son, but when he came into the world, and she saw what a hideous misshapen creature he was (for he had a hump upon his shoulders, and a

head so enormous upon the top of his little body that it was frightful to behold), she fell into such a state of despair that all her attendants thought she was going out of her mind, and they did not know what in the world to do with her, until they brought the King to her side, who was able by degrees to calm her a little; for, though he was almost as much distressed as she was, yet he was wise enough to feel that, since the child had been born deformed, there was nothing for it but to make the best of him; and perhaps he also, secretly, hoped a little that he might prove weakly and die,—which, in the circumstances, would undoubtedly have been a great relief. For, you see, it was rather a serious thing for the eldest son of a great king to be nothing but a hideous lubberly misshapen dwarf.

It very soon became evident, however, that there was not much chance that the poor dwarf would die, for, though he was so ugly and so deformed, he really seemed to have twice the strength of a common baby; and as for his lungs, they were in such a sound condition that he roared like half-a-dozen children together, and the Queen, who heard him crying one day, was thrown into such a state of nervousness by the sound that the King had instantly to call together all the workmen in the kingdom, and set them to work without an hour's delay to build a new wing to the palace, in order that the royal nurseries might be removed a quarter of a mile away from the Queen's apartments.

So they built the new wing with the utmost speed (though it covered half an acre of ground it was completed in four days), and the poor little Prince and all his nurses and servants moved into it ; and then day after day and week after week passed, and his mother never once came near him, or so much as looked at him from one of her windows. 'My dear, it will kill me if I ever set eyes on him again !' she would say to her husband. 'The very thought of it sets me all in a tremble.' And though the King would occasionally reason with her, and do his best to persuade her that, since the poor little monster was unlucky enough to be her son, it really would be only decent to take a little notice of him, yet he never gained anything by his arguments, for whenever the subject was pressed upon her, the Queen would always go into hysterics ; and when a lady goes into hysterics, you know, you may just as well hold your tongue at once.

So after a few months the King gave up the matter as a bad job, for he was so fond of the Queen that he couldn't bear to vex her, and all he could do was to go once a week to see the poor little dwarf himself, and to give the strictest orders that he should be treated by his nurses and servants with all the honour due to the first prince of the blood. But especially he enjoined that he should be always kept out of sight of the Queen, whose health was so delicate, the King said (though nobody had ever been aware of this before) that the

slightest shock to her nerves was more than she could bear.

Well, time went on, and the poor little prince began to grow up, and I am sorry to tell you that the older he grew the uglier he got. Of course all the doctors in the kingdom were brought to see him, and one set of them tried to lengthen his legs, and another set tried to straighten his back, and a third to shorten his arms, and they all held the gravest consultations with one another as to what in the world could be done to make him like other people ; but, after they had tried all the cures that had ever been heard of, and when none of them had the least effect except in torturing the poor little Prince till he was almost wild, they all shook their heads solemnly at one another, and agreed that it was a hopeless case. So then, one after the other, they bowed and took their leave ; and the dwarf, who hated every one of them, ordered his servants in a rage to bolt the door after them, and never to let any creature calling himself a doctor enter his presence again. Which of course was done with the utmost speed, for, to tell the truth, before he was ten years old all the Prince's servants were so terrified at his violent temper that they would not for their lives have dared to disobey any order that he gave them.

It was not the poor dwarf's fault that he had a violent temper : the fault was far more the King's than his. ' Poor little wretch,' the King used to say, ' we needn't

make his life more miserable than it must be, by crossing and vexing him.' And so he had given orders to all the tutors and servants, and whoever else composed the Prince's household, that on all occasions his Royal Highness was to have his own way in everything, and that nobody should ever presume to dispute a word he said. You may fancy what was the consequence! His Royal Highness grew such a young tyrant that everybody who had to do with him wished him well out of the world.

He had the most ungovernable temper that you ever knew in your life. He would think nothing of striking even his tutors in the face ; and as for his servants, they were never safe from him for a moment from morning to night, for he went about constantly with a great thick stick in his hand, that he might be ready at any moment to rap their knuckles ; and I can tell you that what the Prince playfully called a 'rap,' was sometimes anything but a joke to receive. The only way in which it was possible to keep on terms with him at all was by addressing the grossest flattery to him, and you may be sure that, hideous and wicked as he was, there were always plenty of people about him who were ready to purchase peace and easy lives for themselves by telling the poor unhappy dwarf any number of lies he pleased. These people would assure him that he was the most charming prince that had ever lived, and that for their own part they had never seen

any human being to be compared with him. His great face with its coarse features was king-like, they said ; his humped back was a model of strength ; his arms were fit to wield swords and sceptres ; his broad, flat feet were formed to crush his enemies into the dust : and so on ; every deformity that he possessed being converted by these flatterers into some enviable grace or gift, till of course the poor Prince, never hearing anything but these abominable lies, could hardly be expected to do anything but believe them all ; and in fact he *did* believe them to such an extent, and became year after year (as people do who live upon food of this kind) so ravenously desirous of hearing more and more of them, that sometimes his flatterers hardly knew what in the world to say or do next.

All this time the Queen could never be brought to set eyes on him again. Once or twice a year, perhaps, she would ask the King how he was, and if he was as hideous as ever ; but if a single word was ever said about her seeing him she would at once turn so dreadfully sick and faint that of course the conversation had to be changed instantly, for fear she should go off into a swoon. As for the Prince, he was scarcely even aware that he *had* a mother, or, indeed, quite so much as knew what things mothers were ; for, you see, it was naturally rather an awkward subject to mention much before him, in case he might have insisted

upon seeing her, which really under the circumstances would have been a most terrific business. All the tutors and valets and footmen and grooms used to shake in their shoes at the bare thought of what should be done if, some unlucky day, the Prince were to take *this* into his head. But, most fortunately (so silent did everybody keep in his presence about the Queen), it never occurred to him.

Year followed year, and the Prince grew from a child to a boy, and from a boy to a young man ; and the older he grew, I am grieved to say, the more terrifically ugly he became. ' I don't think there was ever such a monster seen before on the face of the earth ! ' the poor King would often say to himself, after he had been paying him a visit, and would sigh so deeply that it would have made you quite low-spirited to hear him ; and indeed his anxiety about the Prince, and his sad thoughts of what would become of the country when he himself should be dead and the Prince king over it, in course of time came quite to tell upon his health.

' My dear, you trouble yourself a great deal too much about the horrid creature,' the Queen would remonstrate with him sometimes (for, to tell the truth, the Queen managed better, and so long as the hideous Prince was kept quite out of her sight it was wonderful after a time how little she used to worry herself about him). ' By the time he comes to be king,—if he ever is king at all

(but I 'm sure I hope he won't be, for it makes me quite shudder to think of it), *we*, I trust, at any rate, will both be dead and buried ; and really,' said the Queen, with a shrug of her shoulders, ' though I think I have as much heart as most people, I can't make myself miserable constantly with thinking of posterity and *its* troubles.' And then the Queen would delicately fan herself, and use her smelling-salts, and pour eau-de-Cologne upon her hair, and so on, till all these nice little remedies had relieved the unpleasant feelings that always came over her whenever she was forced for a few minutes to think or speak of the poor Prince.

However, the King couldn't so easily forget him, and indeed, as time went on, and he found himself growing older and becoming less and less strong, the thought of his poor ignorant deformed unhappy violent-tempered son pressed upon him heavier and heavier, till, at last, it one day occurred to him whether it might not be a good thing to send him on his travels for a time, and see whether, perhaps, a little going about in the world might not possibly do some good to him. For, you see, he had hitherto led the most unnaturally secluded life imaginable, and, though the King's whole desire at first had been merely to put him anywhere where he might be shut up, yet now (when he felt that it might not be long before he would have to become king in his stead) he was beginning to get terrified at the state of ignorance in which the poor creature had been brought up,

and could no longer rest without trying to do something to remedy it.

So one morning, when he went to see the Prince, — ‘Dwarf,’ he said to him, ‘should you like to go away and travel for a time? I would give you leave of absence for a year if you liked.’

The Dwarf looked at the King as he spoke, and answered nothing for a moment or two, for this notion of going away to travel was one that had never yet struck him; but he considered the matter for a few seconds, and then—

‘I’ll go to-morrow,’ he said.

‘Well, that’s sharp and decided!’ cried the King in great delight. ‘You don’t let the grass grow under your feet, Dwarf, when you decide upon a thing. However, *I* have no objection,’ said the King eagerly. ‘Set off *to-night*, if you like, for me, my dear boy.’

The King in all his life had never before called the Prince ‘my dear boy;’ but, you see, the prospect of getting him so unexpectedly fast out of the country had naturally raised his spirits and made him feel quite affectionate.

‘To-morrow’s soon enough,’ said the Prince.

‘Well then, to-morrow let it be,’ replied the King.

‘And where do you want me to go?’ asked the Prince.

‘My dear Dwarf,’ exclaimed the King, ‘please yourself! The whole Continent lies open to you. Or if

you would prefer the New World,—or possibly,' said the King, trembling with hope, 'the centre of Africa'—But at this point the Prince put on such a terrific scowl that the King stopped hurriedly, and began to cough.

'I *don't* prefer the New World,' said the Prince sulkily.

'Well, well, keep to the Old one then,' replied the King, a little crossly too. 'Go where you like, so that'—'so that you go far enough,' the King had been on the point of saying, but he luckily checked himself just in time, and added instead (after another little cough, with which his Majesty seemed at present to be a good deal troubled)—'so that it pleases you.'

'Leave me alone for that,' replied the Prince. 'Fancy me doing what *didn't* please me!' And at the bare notion of such a ridiculous thing the Prince began to chuckle so horribly that the King, though he was tolerably used to him now, was really obliged to go precipitately out of the room, for he couldn't bear to look at him.

You may fancy what a tremendously busy day the whole household had in getting ready for the Prince's starting next morning. Of course, even though he *was* such a hideous creature, it was necessary for him, as the King's son, to have a great retinue with him of servants and carriages and baggage. It was thought advisable too that he should have a few companions, so four young noblemen of the highest birth in the kingdom

were commanded to attend him, and two of them were ordered always to ride with him in his coach. Directions also were privately given to these four young lords that in every possible way they should direct and guide the poor ignorant and foolish Prince, and try to teach him wisdom and keep him out of mischief.

‘*Moral* mischief, of course I mean,’ explained the King as he gave these orders to the four young lords. ‘As for his running *personal* risks,—why, you know a man must be brave if he would be worth anything, so don’t trouble yourselves to restrain his Royal Highness too severely in that direction.’

Upon which the four young lords bowed solemnly, and perfectly well understood what the King meant.

They set out the next morning, and a splendid show they made! First came a troop of horse with their swords drawn; then an enormous military band, that made such a noise you couldn’t hear yourself speak; then the Prince and two of the young lords in a great coach (it wasn’t an *open* one though: the King took care of that!) all covered with gold; and then behind these so many other carriages and waggons and carts and drags that you would have thought not only the heir-apparent but the whole of the royal family, at the very least, were about to leave the kingdom for good and all. It was a glorious sight! ‘What a fool I was never to set about seeing the world before!’ the Prince ex-

claimed ; and he put his great head out of the window to look at the show that he was making, and laughed out loud with delight.

At this very moment, as ill-luck would have it, the Queen was just venturing from behind a curtain to take a single peep at the procession. She had barely fixed her eyes on the great gilded coach when out came the Prince's frightful head from the window of it.

'O—h!!!' cried the Queen at this tremendous sight ; and if there had not been six Maids of Honour standing immediately behind her she would certainly have fallen down flat upon the floor. Even as it was she went into hysterics, and though the King was summoned instantly to try and quiet her, he had to kneel by her side for three hours and a half, holding the strongest smelling-salts to her nose, before she left off screaming.

'Well, I only hope now that we may have seen the last of him !' said the poor King to himself, as he sank down into a seat at last, quite worn out.

I can't tell you very much about what the Prince did upon his travels, Children, [said Cousin Trix,] for it would make my story too long, but I will try to give you a general idea of how things went with him. And first of all I must tell you how he got on with the four young lords,—which, as far as three of them are concerned, is a very easy task indeed, for the fact was he didn't get on with them at all. Before they had been a week together they found that they could not live

with the Prince on any terms. They were very high-bred, courteous, proud young gentlemen, who had no notion of putting up with rude words and unmannerly acts from the greatest prince that ever was, so, after they had borne the Dwarf's behaviour to them in indignant silence for four or five days, they at last, one morning, spoke a little of their minds to him, and then very respectfully made their bows, and betook themselves again to their own homes.

But the fourth young nobleman remained behind, and he was a very different kind of person from the other three. *He* could put up with the Dwarf's behaviour very well indeed ; he had no notion whatever of returning home on account of it as the others did. Indeed, when they said good-bye to him, he wished them God-speed with the greatest cheerfulness, and laughed with satisfaction when their backs were turned, for he had then got the very thing that he had desired,—that is to say, he had got the sole possession of the Dwarf, which may seem, indeed, to *you*, Children, a very singular thing to want, but which to the fourth young lord (his name was Lord Edgar) was the very thing in this world that he coveted most. For he was a very cunning and crafty man, and he had a shrewd guess that by managing matters cleverly he could soon get the upper hand of the Dwarf. Nor, indeed, was he wrong. Before a month had gone over their heads so *very* cleverly had he managed that there was not a

thing in the world the Dwarf (if he could) would not have done for him.

Poor Dwarf! I think he was very much to be pitied, for in spite of his being so ugly (which he couldn't help), and so ignorant (which he couldn't help either), and in spite even of his frightful temper (which was far more the fault of other people than his own), he was not at heart a bad Dwarf at all. He might have been made good and unselfish and affectionate if only he had been brought up better, and even as it was—though he had been spoilt in every possible way—he was ready, much as a stupid ugly dog might have been, to love anybody who would show anything like love for him. Only the difficulty had always been hitherto to get anybody who *could* love him, or even *pretend* to love him. Flattery and obsequiousness, and all things of that kind, had been bought for him without limit, but *love* for such a hideous creature nobody had ever thought yet either of giving or buying. Yet this sharp Lord Edgar had not been in the poor Prince's company for a couple of days before he had found out that he need but make a few professions of love for him to be able to twist him round his little finger. So he very soon began to pretend that he was growing so fond of the Dwarf that he couldn't bear to be out of his sight; and the result was, as I have said already, that before the end of a month there was not anything in the wide world that the poor Dwarf would not have done for him.

For a time after this state of things began there is no doubt that the Prince was a great deal happier than he had ever been in his life before ; indeed, I may say he never before had had any idea at all of what happiness meant, and the discovery of it that he made now had such an effect upon him that he was really like a transformed creature. He brightened up into something quite human-looking ; he used to talk and laugh and be merry just like other people, and sometimes for days together he would never so much as give an ill word to anybody. Then, as for his love for Lord Edgar, there is no describing how great it was. The poor foolish fellow would take the young lord with him everywhere, and often and often would make him act the Prince instead of himself ; and the more that people honoured Lord Edgar, or cheered him as he passed along the streets, or cried out what a handsome fine young Prince he was, the greater was the Dwarf's delight ; indeed, if Lord Edgar had called him to brush his boots, and had but said a kind word or two in asking him to do it, the Dwarf, I do believe, without a moment's hesitation, would at once have set to brushing them with all his heart and might.

He was very happy. What did he care though Lord Edgar spent his money by hundreds and thousands of pounds ? Lord Edgar might have taken the last penny from him that he had in the world, and he never would have grudged it to him. Had he not made the whole

world beautiful to him with his kindness and love? Did he not owe him a million times more than any money could pay? They used to talk together of all that they would do when the Prince should become king, and between them, you may believe me, it was a very pretty part indeed that they assigned Lord Edgar to play under the coming reign. He was to be Prime Minister, of course, and Chancellor of the Exchequer too, I think. He was to be the Prince's right hand, and his guide and adviser in everything he did. And as for honours that were to be heaped upon him, there was to be no end of them. He was to be made a duke, with the largest revenue in all the kingdom, and was to take precedence of every living creature in it, except the princes of the blood.

So they used to sketch out this pleasant future for themselves as they went from place to place, and while they talked of the future they managed to make the most of the present also, as Lord Edgar knew right well how to do. Wherever they went he contrived to secure a large amount of pleasure to himself, and he was so kind as generally to take care that some small portion of it should fall also to the Prince's share, for, though he did not in reality care two straws or a brass farthing whether the Prince enjoyed himself or not, he knew very well indeed that it was his interest to keep him amused and cheerful. Both well content, therefore, the time passed on till they had been abroad for near six months.

And then suddenly an unexpected event happened. One day as they were sitting together, discussing where they should go next, a messenger arrived, who had been travelling night and day, and brought the news that the King was dead.

'We must go home instantly!' cried Lord Edgar the very moment he had heard these tidings, and his eyes flashed like beacon lights. 'Order the horses! We must go post haste, my lord! Let the luggage and everything else follow us. My dearest Lord! my King!' exclaimed Lord Edgar, and, suddenly bethinking himself, down he went in the most graceful way imaginable on his knees, and in his enthusiasm seized the Dwarf's great hand and kissed it.

But the poor Dwarf had tears in his eyes, and was hardly thinking just yet about his kingship.

'My father was never unkind to me; I'm sorry he's dead, Edgar,' he said.

And then, of course, Lord Edgar instantly remembered that *he* was deeply sorry too, and he was even so much affected that he had to put his hand over his face for a few moments to hide his emotion.

'He was a great man,—a great good man,' he said; 'but he has a son who will prove himself more than worthy of him. My dear Lord, you must not give way to grief. The horses will be at the door in twenty minutes.'

And so, indeed, the horses were ; and within the half-hour the Dwarf and Lord Edgar were galloping at full speed home.

It was the happiest gallop that Lord Edgar had ever had in the whole course of his existence. What dreams he dreamt while it lasted ! How his ambition mounted higher and higher, till, before it ended, he had pictured himself as not only *nearest* to the throne, but as a step higher even than that !

For three days they rode at their utmost speed : on the morning of the fourth they came at last within sight of their own country.

‘ It will not be a very triumphant entry,’ Lord Edgar said, with a smile, as they were about to cross the borders ; ‘ but how soon the news will spread ! What a concourse we shall have had about us before we sleep under the palace roof to-night !’

The news did indeed spread soon ; Lord Edgar was correct enough in that ; it spread like wild-fire right and left ; but the Dwarf and Lord Edgar slept under *no* palace roof that night, for long before night came again they had learnt that the nobles and the soldiery had gathered round the Queen, and had declared that she and not the hideous Dwarf should be their Sovereign.

What was to be done now ? Lord Edgar cried, with such a look upon his face as it was not good to

see, that they must collect an army instantly to rout their enemies ; that he would raise the country to defend the cause of its lawful king ; and, to do him justice, for a couple of days he tried to accomplish this design with his whole might and main,—as if he had the energy and strength of a score of men. But the country *wouldn't* rise ; none but a few dozen of people gathered round his standard ; and by the time the second day was ended both the Dwarf, and even Lord Edgar, felt that their cause was lost.

‘I shall be a king without a kingdom,’ the poor Dwarf said then. ‘Well, even if it must be so, there are worse fates than mine. I have lost my crown, but I have kept my friend.’ And with that he smiled into Lord Edgar’s face, and held out his hand to him to clasp.

‘You bear your wrongs, my Lord, more cheerfully than I can bear them for you,’ Lord Edgar answered gloomily enough ; and that was true, certainly, for a more wicked temper than Lord Edgar had shown for the last few hours no man was ever in.

However, after a little while, he tried to put on a rather less scowling face, and then the Prince and he fell to talking of what they had better do. He would take the allowance they offered him, the Prince said, (for the Queen and her Ministers had sent a deputation to him the day before, to tell him that they would give

him a very tolerably handsome income if he would resign his pretensions to the crown, and get out of the country as fast as possible), and he and Lord Edgar would go back to some of the pleasant places they had left behind them; and for his own part, the Dwarf said cheerfully, he had little doubt that he should be as happy—perhaps happier—as a prince than as a king; and as for Lord Edgar—

‘You will bear my changed fortunes with me, I think,’ the Prince said to him, with such a placid, confiding smile. ‘Prime Minister still, and prime friend and comforter, for as long as this poor life lasts.’

Upon which Lord Edgar appeared very much affected, and declared that he would serve the Prince upon his bended knees, and that to be with him wherever he went was the only thing he cared for in this world. And then, when all this had been comfortably settled, they said good-night to one another and went to bed.

But in the morning, when the Prince rose up again, Lord Edgar was gone! In the night he had left him, and gone off to make his peace with the Queen.

I know you are sorry for the poor Dwarf, Children: I think everybody with a kind heart would be sorry for him. To lose his crown had seemed so small a thing to him; but to lose Lord Edgar was to lose everything he had on earth—to lose love and hope and faith and

happiness all at one blow. During these last months all kinds of good and beautiful things had been slowly taking root in the Dwarf's heart : he had been growing so gentle and considerate, so grateful for his own happiness, so full of kindly feeling to the world all round him, and with such trust in people's goodness that, I think, for weeks past he had never had a hard thought of any living creature. But the whole of this had sprung out of his love for Lord Edgar, and when Lord Edgar deceived and left him it was worse for him a thousand times than if he had never trusted and believed and loved. Every kind feeling that had come into him turned at once into bitterness and hate. Like a foolish, untaught, half-savage creature as he was, he believed that all the world must be wicked because one man in it had been false to him, and resolved to hate the whole of his fellow-creatures because one of them had not deserved his love. He felt quite desperate and reckless, and careless what became of him. He ordered his servants to leave him, and drove them from his presence with blows. As for leading the life that he had planned to lead with Lord Edgar, the very thought of it was wormwood and bitterness to him. All he desired now was to hide himself where he should never see the face of a living creature again, or hear the sound of a human voice.

So the day after Lord Edgar had left him, he too

went away, all alone ; and where he went to, or what became of him, no person knew or cared.

‘Now, you are not going to stop there, Cousin Trix!’ cried Jack in an injured tone. ‘I can’t bear stories that break off in that way.’

‘But what’s to be done, Hercules? I can’t go on!’ said Cousin Trix dolefully.

‘*Why* can’t you go on?’ cried several of the children at once, all alive with curiosity.

‘My dears, it’s a secret,’ said Cousin Trix mysteriously.

‘A secret! Oh, Cousin Trix,’ cried Daisy eagerly, ‘tell *me*!’ For Daisy thought that perhaps she wanted to stop because she had broken her stay-lace or lost her garter, and that she did not quite like to say so before the boys.

But Cousin Trix laughed, and had nothing whatever of that nature to confide to Daisy.

‘If you won’t repeat it to anybody, Children, I’ll tell you *all*,’ she said. ‘The reason is this,—and she spoke very solemnly,—‘I can’t *myself* imagine where the Dwarf went.’

‘Oh, Cousin Trix!’ cried Daisy and Jack derisively ; and Roger stood with open eyes and stared.

‘What do you mean by saying you can’t imagine it?’ asked Roger. ‘Do you mean that you are making it all out of your head just as you go along?’ And Roger looked at her severely, as if she had been taking him in.

‘Well, my dear, did *you* for your part think it was all true?’ inquired Cousin Trix blandly; ‘and suppose that I didn’t make it out of my head at all?’

Upon which Roger became puzzled, and wasn’t ready instantly with a response.

‘You’re a goose!’ said Hercules contemptuously, and there ensued a little skirmishing between the brothers, which it is not necessary to report.

When this was comfortably over,—

‘You’ll manage to find out where the Dwarf went to before to-morrow, won’t you, Cousin Trix?’ asked Jack.

‘I’ll *try* to do it,’ said Cousin Trix. ‘I’ll think of it, if possible, while I eat my dinner.’

‘It will help to keep you awake,’ said Jack.

‘I’m not so sure of that,’ replied Cousin Trix. ‘However, I can make the attempt.’

And then as there was no more of the Dwarf’s story to be got out of her for that day, the children fell to talking about other things.

To the children’s satisfaction, when she came into

the schoolroom on the following afternoon, Cousin Trix announced that she *had* found out where the Dwarf went, and that she now knew all about it.

‘A little bird whispered it all into my ear this morning,’ she said ; ‘so take your places, my dears, and I’ll tell it to you as fast as I can.’

The children therefore took their seats round the fire, and Cousin Trix went on.





THE DWARF.

PART II.



THE place that the Dwarf went to was a great forest, which stretched over many many miles of land. It was a dark gloomy forest, where the trees grew very large, and so close together that scarcely any daylight penetrated through them ; and all the people in the country round believed that the whole place was haunted. Not one of them, if they could have helped it, would have passed through it after nightfall ; and indeed by far the greater part of them would rather not pass through it either by night or day. Here, where the trees grew biggest and darkest, the unhappy Dwarf fixed his abode and built himself a hut.

And then his new life began, and a very sorrowful life it was. He had indeed a good deal to do of one

kind or another (which was so far well), to enable him in such a lonely place to get any sort of living for himself at all, but none of the work he ever did took a grain of the wrath and bitterness out of his heart. Instead of getting less bitter, the longer he lived the more and more angry and hard and full of hate he grew, till he seemed to have so stripped himself of human feelings that the few people who came across him in the forest feared him (and with good reason) more than they did the wood-demons themselves. In fact, at last it began to be whispered abroad that he actually *was* one of the wood-demons in bodily shape, for any one either so ugly or so cruel no man or woman had ever before seen.

Whatever had been by nature bad in the Dwarf was flourishing and growing and increasing like a green bay-tree: whatever had been good or loveable or noble, had all gone dead, as if some bitter frost had killed it. Before he had lived a year in the forest he had become so cruel in his hate, that if in the darkness any benighted wayfarer had lost his way, he would not have lifted his voice, or showed him a gleam from his lamp, to save him from perishing with hunger or cold. He only used to laugh bitterly to himself if in the long nights he ever heard a living creature calling for help. 'Let the wandering wretch die,' was always his thought; 'it will be one fool and rogue the less in the world.' He never thought—poor, bitter-hearted Dwarf—that, if the world

was really so sorrowfully full of rogues and fools, there was work enough in it, in trying to make them better for him and all other honest men to do.

Slowly and sadly the time went on, and winter and summer had passed more than once over the Dwarf's head, when it chanced one night, as he was sitting brooding over his fire, that all at once he heard a curious wailing sound coming low and soft from the outside of his cottage door. It was a still, cold winter night, when all the forest by a rare chance seemed asleep, and the slightest sound was heard distinctly on the frosty air.

'What's this now?' thought the Dwarf to himself; and, the strange plaintive moaning being a kind of thing that he had never heard before, he sat erect on his seat and began to listen to it.

For several minutes the sound came and went, now ceasing for a few minutes, and now beginning again, always in the same soft sorrowful way; and then at last there came a little click to the latch, as if some hand that could hardly reach to it was trying to lift it up.

On this the Dwarf started from his seat with a scowl as black as thunder on his brow. His door indeed was secured inside by a bar as big as his arm, so that it would have needed a pretty strong hand from without to have opened it, but the thought that anybody was even so much as *trying* to open it roused a perfect storm of indignation, exactly as if he had been insulted, in the Dwarf's breast. With one hand he caught up a

great club that he always kept by him ready for an emergency, and with the other, advancing to the door, he grasped the large bar that was drawn across it, and then in his most terrific voice he shouted out—

‘Who’s there?’

But no answer came. For a few moments all was as still as death; and then all at once in the silence there came once more the little faint click upon the latch.

In an instant (thinking to himself, ‘You scoundrel, I’ll have you now!’) the Dwarf shot back the bolt, and threw the door wide open; and what do you think he saw? Before him there was nothing but a tiny little figure of a child covered all over nearly to its knees with a flood of golden hair.

He was so amazed at this sight that for several moments he stood staring straight before him, with his eyes open to twice their usual size; it was full a dozen seconds before he could begin to speak. At last—

‘What are you doing here?’ he called out in a gruff angry voice.

The child looked up into his face, and softly said—

‘I want to come in!’

‘I daresay you do!’ retorted the Dwarf with a scornful laugh. ‘But you won’t *get* in, so be off with you! If you stay here whimpering at *my* door I’ll send you off soon in a way you won’t like. Now tramp, you fool!’ And with that the Dwarf slammed the door

to again, and put up the heavy bar, and returned to his seat by the fire.

But though he sat down again as he had sat before, and though all without was now once more quite still, the Dwarf somehow could not fall again into his former train of thought. He had been thinking of Lord Edgar, with the frantic unappeasable anger with which the poor unhappy creature always dwelt now on the memory of that false friend, and he tried to go on thinking of him, but try as he would he could not do it. He could think of nothing but that strange little white figure standing at the door,—wondering where it could have come from, and who it was, and what would become of it.

‘It will never live out there through the night,—such a bitter cold night as it is,’ the Dwarf thought to himself, and he shivered a little. He had let grown men before now lie out in the frost and die, but he never until to-night had closed his door against a little child.

It was curious how he could not forget it. He stirred his fire, and bent forward, and warmed his hands over the blaze. Yes, it was bitterly cold, and the ground outside as hard as iron with the frost. Nothing on, too, but a little white frock! Why, a couple of hours—less than that—would freeze her to death! And then, just as he had thought this, the low plaintive wailing sound came softly again, and the Dwarf’s heart gave such a leap that it seemed to spring up to his throat.

It was folly and nonsense! He wouldn't budge a step to save the lives of all the children in Christendom! he cried out savagely to himself next moment, and, knitting his brows, he sat doggedly fastened to his seat; but, be as dogged and as obstinate as he liked, he could not keep himself from listening, almost without drawing breath, to every sound of the low moaning outside, and each time it ceased his heart stood still, and each time it began anew his heart beat quick; till at last, after a good many minutes had passed, it ceased altogether, and everything once more was quite still.

Well, the wicked Dwarf would get peace now, you will think! My dears, happily for himself the Dwarf was not quite so wicked as he wanted to be, and when the crying ceased he could not on any terms get peace at all. For ten minutes he sat with his hands upon his knees, and his eyes upon the door, wondering, with an intensity which he had no power to repress, whether the child was gone,—or was dying,—or *dead*; till at last he could endure it no longer, and starting up, though almost in a passion with himself, he went once more to the door, and opened it and looked out.

There was no little child then, standing before him, and looking up into his face, but a small white heap had fallen down upon the door-step, and was lying there quite still.

'It's dead!' the Dwarf thought instantly to himself, and a great trembling came all over him. He stood

looking at it, and feeling as if he did not dare to touch it. It lay there so quiet in its painless sleep, and a quarter of an hour ago how it had moaned and wailed ! A quarter of an hour ago, when he would not let it in ! Could it be dead already ? What if it was not dead, but was only in a sort of faint or trance, half-frozen with the cold ?

The Dwarf stooped down slowly, almost as if he was afraid, and took it in his arms. As he lifted it he turned its face up to the light that was coming brightly through the open door. What a lovely little face it was ! like the faces of angels he had sometimes dreamed of long ago,—when he cared for angels (which he didn't now). Trembling with a strange kind of fear, he carried his burden in and laid it before the fire.

Of what to do with it next he knew little enough, but by a kind of instinct he began, when he had brought it in, to chafe the little cold hands and feet. If life were still there at all, he knew that warmth would quicken it. Down upon his knees before the hot fire he rubbed and rubbed, his great hard palms touching the delicate flesh almost tenderly, as more and more eagerly he did his work, now chafing the small white arms, now pressing the cold feet, off which he had stripped the little stockings and shoes, and at last even warming them in his bosom, with all the time such strange feelings rising in his heart as he thought had all been dead and buried years ago.

At last the closed eyes opened. The Dwarf with a great start gave up his rubbing, and the two looked each into the other's face.

'She'll be frightened now, and begin to cry,' the Dwarf thought bitterly within himself (for the poor Dwarf knew a good deal more about his hideousness now than he had done in the old days of his flatterers, when he was a prince); but she looked at him with great, bright blue eyes, and didn't cry one bit. Instead of crying, indeed, there came slowly about her lips, after she had given a good long gaze at him, a little soft contented smile, and, to the Dwarf's utter surprise, she curled her head round upon the arm that he had put beneath her to hold it up, until she had got it comfortably laid upon his shoulder, when she quietly shut her eyes again, just as if she meant to go cosily off to sleep.

The Dwarf had certainly never been so much astonished in all his life; and perhaps, too, in spite of all the hardness and cruelty and wickedness of the last couple of years, he had never in all his life been so much moved. His knees trembled under him as he rose up with the child in his arms, and held it for a minute close to him, with the thought coming strangely over him that for the first time since he came into the world he was pressing a living creature to his breast.

The Dwarf sat down, and for a long hour the child slept in his arms. How can I tell you all the thoughts

that during that hour passed through his mind? Sad and strange enough thoughts they were; some of them so angry and bitter, and full of the old suspicion and cruelty and hate, and some of them so sorrowful and gentle, and full of remorse. It was as though a good and a bad angel were fighting together within him; the bad angel that had held possession of his whole heart so long fighting against one that, with her white robes and her golden hair, was like the child that was lying sleeping in his arms.

It was late at night—he did not know how late—when at last the little thing opened her eyes again, and looked up once more in the Dwarf's face.

'When she awakens she will want to go away, I suppose,' he had been thinking, half sadly, half bitterly, to himself; 'or the people who have lost her will come to-morrow and take her home,'—when the great blue eyes opened, and instead of saying a word about going away, or seeming to have any thought whatever of such a thing, the little creature just sighed out plaintively—

'I'm *so* hungry, Dwarf!'

'My dear, I am sure you are! What a goose I was not to think of that sooner!' the Dwarf eagerly replied; and with that he started up and put the child down on the floor, and hurried away to his pantry to bring out something to eat.

As you may suppose, however, there was not much

that was very savoury in the Dwarf's pantry. To tell the truth, he had nothing there whatever but some hard biscuits and a piece of mouldy cheese ; and when he brought them out and set them on the table, the little thing looked as if she did not know what in the world to do with them.

'Ah, you're used to different sort of fare from this !' the Dwarf exclaimed half surlily, when he saw her perplexity.

But the child only quietly smiled, and, taking one of the hard biscuits in her hand, sat down on a little stool before the fire, and began in silence to munch away. Then the Dwarf too went back to his seat, and for ten minutes not another word was said.

The Dwarf sat looking at the child, and the child sat looking at the fire. She never turned her head till she had eaten all the biscuit up to the last crumb ; but when the whole of it was gone, then she composedly crossed her hands upon her knees, and, lifting up her face, began to speak.

'Dwarf,' she said gravely, 'why do you live here ?'

The Dwarf gave a start, and sat up in his chair. He had lived in the forest for a couple of years, and nobody yet had ever dared to put this question to him. The blood came rushing to his swarthy face, and made it uglier than ever, as he answered in a hoarse, fierce voice—

'I live here because I hate the world and the people

in it. I live here because one of them did a great injury to me long ago.'

'Poor Dwarf!' said the child softly.

The Dwarf's angry tone did not seem to frighten her the least bit in the world.

'Poor Dwarf!' she said again, after a few moments, still more gently; and then she edged her stool a little nearer to him, and quietly put her clasped hands on his knees. The Dwarf began to tremble, he did not know why.

She sat looking up into his face with her large solemn eyes, so pityingly and so inquiringly that the Dwarf could not bear to meet their gaze, and turned his face away, knowing, as he did, that he did not deserve to have her seem so sorry for him; and presently she said, in her low, clear voice, that was like the soft notes of a flute—

'And so you live here all by yourself to try and grow better than the world?'

'No, I don't!' cried out the Dwarf fiercely. 'I'm not good! I don't want to be good! I don't believe in goodness!' cried the frantic Dwarf, and he stamped his foot, and ground his teeth, and scowled in such a rage that it was wonderful that the child didn't burst out crying on the instant for pure terror.

But not she; she never seemed to think of crying. Instead of doing anything of that kind she actually, as soon as ever his burst of passion was over, stretched up

her hand, and took two or three of the Dwarf's great fingers into it, and began to stroke them and caress them softly, saying nothing but 'Poor Dwarf!' once more, as if she could hardly speak for pity. For several moments she stroked the great rough cruel hand, and then she gently laid her cheek down on it, and let the whole of her golden hair fall on his knees.

The Dwarf sat with his heart beating wildly, and with great tears gathering and swelling in his eyes. Who and what was this creature that had come to him,—this little white thing, that seemed as if she meant to make the earth once more like heaven to him? As the soft cheek pressed his horny hand, the warm touch of it seemed to have power like a charm to change all his wrath and bitterness into remorse and grief and passionate yearning. He sat looking at her, till all his heart burst out at last in a great sudden sob and cry.

'Child, are you going to stay with me? Oh, little golden child, stay with me!' he said.

'Yes; I will stay with you,' the child answered calmly. 'We will live in the forest together awhile—we two. But to-night I am very tired,' said the little thing wearily, 'for I have come a long way to-day, and my feet are sore.'

'You shall come to bed. I wish I had a feather-bed to lay you on, and down pillows for your head,' said the Dwarf; 'but my mattress is hard, and my only pillow is a pillow of straw.'

‘I shall not mind that,’ answered the child, with a pleasant smile.

And then the Dwarf took her in his arms and carried her to his own truckle-bed ; and he himself passed the night by the fireside.

A very strange night it was,—full of fevered dreams and wild startings awake and busy tumultuous thoughts. A dozen times he went to the bed to look if the child were still there. Again and again he dreamt that people came and took her from him. It was broad daylight when he fell at length for the first time into a quiet sleep, and then he slept so soundly that when he awoke again the sun had been up for several hours, and ever so much (as he found) had been going on in the cottage, for the child had long been astir, and had lighted the fire and swept the floor and got the breakfast,—all as deftly and quietly as a little Brownie.

‘As deftly as a little *what*, Cousin Trix?’ asked Roger, knitting his brows.

‘As a Brownie, my dear,’ replied Cousin Trix. ‘Brownies are benevolent little fairies who have been wonderfully gifted with a taste for housemaid’s work. In the families they frequent they come in the dead of the night, and in the most dexterous way fall to sweeping and cleaning, just like so many little scullery-maids. In one respect, however, they are not like this little child of mine, for a brownie, when she has got through

her night's labours, always makes a point of instantly vanishing,—probably, I should think, because, after doing so much dirty work, she feels that she cannot be very fit to be seen; but this little thing did her work and *didn't* vanish, and though one would have supposed that, after sweeping out a room and lighting a fire, all in a white frock, she must have been a very grubby little object, the fact was so much the reverse that you would have thought her dress was fresher and cleaner than ever when she sat down at last by the fireside to wait until the Dwarf should awake.'

She was sitting demurely on her little stool when the Dwarf opened his eyes at last.

'You sleep long in the morning, Dwarf,' she said immediately, with a little smile.

'Have *you* been up long?' asked the Dwarf, rubbing his eyes. And then he began to look about him. 'Why, dear me, you've lighted the fire!' said the Dwarf.

'Yes. I was very cold,' answered the child.

'And you've—you've got the breakfast!' exclaimed the Dwarf. 'And—and—oh, bless me! you've swept the floor!'

'Yes; I've swept the floor and got the breakfast,' answered the child very placidly.

'And I was sound asleep all the time!' cried the Dwarf, feeling quite ashamed and uncomfortable.

‘Yes ; you were *very* sound asleep,’ replied the child. ‘But now come to breakfast, for I have been up so long that I am quite hungry.’

So they both went and sat down at the table together, the child looking as much at home as if she had lived in the cottage all her life.

‘Dwarf,’ she asked next, ‘will you say grace?’

‘Will I say *what*?’ cried the Dwarf, and opened his eyes to double their usual size.

But instead of repeating her question she only said a little childish grace very softly to herself, and then they began their meal.

‘Child,’ said the Dwarf, after a few minutes’ silence, ‘tell me where you come from and who you are?’

‘I come from far away,’ answered the child. ‘I have lived in many places and seen many people.’

‘And did you come here into the forest by yourself?’ asked the Dwarf?

‘I go everywhere by myself,’ replied the child, with a strange quiet smile.

‘And, Child, what are you called?’ said the Dwarf.

‘I have many names,’ said the child. ‘People call me what they please.’

Then the Dwarf looked into the child’s face, and somehow feared to ask her any other question.

‘*You* must give me a name too,’ she said presently. ‘Wherever I go I am given a name, and I keep it for a little while, and then—’

She suddenly paused, and the Dwarf gave a great start forward in his chair, for it seemed to him all at once that the figure of the child was growing dim. He started up, and, hardly knowing what he did, he fell before her on his knees.

‘Little one, stay with me!’ he cried out wildly. It seemed to him at that moment as though, if she went away from him, he should die. ‘Stay with me,—to be my blessing and my hope!’

‘I have been called Hope a good many times,’ replied the child. ‘It is a pretty name, but I am a little tired of it. I would rather you thought of something else.’

‘I would call you “Angel” if I might,’ said the Dwarf, almost below his breath.

But the child shook her head.

‘No; that could not be,’ she answered.

‘Then I will call you “Star,” he said, ‘for you have come to me like a star in the night.’

Well, with this name the child appeared to be satisfied, and, as breakfast was over now, she got up and put the things away, just as she might have done if she had been the Dwarf’s little housekeeper for years.

‘And now shall we have a walk in the forest?’ she asked next, when she had made everything orderly and nice.

‘You shall have a walk in the forest if you would like it,’ replied the Dwarf; and so they went out together, hand in hand.

What a beautiful, strange, blessed walk it was ! So many times the poor Dwarf had paced those dark and lonely forest paths with only hate and bitterness in his heart ; now, as he held Star's little hand, it was as if the gentle touch of it sent a warm current to his heart, that changed all his old wrath and cruelty into sadness and remorse and love. How the very forest seemed to smile upon him ! Through the leafless branches of the great trees the sun came down as if to kiss Star's golden hair ; there were birds above his head that sung as the forest birds seemed never to have sung before : stealing out from holes and crannies in the wood came living creatures who stood and looked with bright unfrightened gentle eyes at him and Star. Winter even though it was, he almost expected as he looked around him to see the forest flowers in bloom.

'You must take me to all the prettiest places,' Star said, as they walked along, 'and you must tell me all about the beasts and birds. Do they all know you, and do you love them ? Do they come when the weather is very cold, and let you feed them out of your hand ?'

'Alas, little Star,' answered the Dwarf sorrowfully, 'I have never since I lived in the forest given food to any living thing but you.'

'It is not too late ; we will feed them together,' said Star quietly, and still went on trustfully holding his hand.

‘We will do many things together,—we two ; we will learn many things. The great world is so beautiful,’ said the child.

‘Yes, it *is* beautiful,’ answered the Dwarf trembling. ‘It *is* beautiful—God help me!’ he cried ; for it seemed to him, as he walked on, as if it was a *new* world, and not the same one that he had ever known before in all his life.

‘When I get tired can you carry me, Dwarf?’ the child asked presently.

‘You are so small and light, Star, that I could carry you the whole day long,’ the Dwarf replied. ‘Are you tired now?’

‘The rough roots of the trees hurt my feet,’ she said.

So then he took her in his arms, and they went on so through the forest, with his shoulder making a pillow for her golden head.

It seemed to the Dwarf that day as if all his life for these two last years had been some wicked and dreadful dream. Had he really passed these long and desolate years cursing and hating his fellow-men ? He shuddered and trembled all the day with an indescribable horror and misery and remorse ; and presently a feeling of such terror and shame came over him that he shrank from the sight of the child, and would, if he could, have hidden himself from her. But she would not let him. When he stole out of the cottage and tried to conceal himself amongst the trees, she came to seek him, and

plaintively called him to come again to her. 'Dwarf, come back and talk to me!' 'Dwarf, come back and play with me!' she cried; and he had no choice but to return, and let her take his hand, and draw him once more into the house.

'You should not go away from me, you know,' she said to him quite gravely once, 'because we have so many things to say to one another.'

'So many things, have we?' the Dwarf asked, with a faint smile. 'What are they, Star? Tell me some of them.'

'You have to teach me all the things you know,' she answered. 'Living here alone you must learn and think about so many things. Let us sit down together, Dwarf, and tell me some of them.'

'I can't, child! I can't!' the poor Dwarf cried. 'I have learnt nothing in the forest that is holy or good. I would as soon take a cup of poison and make you drink it as tell you the things that I have thought since I have lived here.'

'Poor Dwarf!' the child said softly.

Whenever the Dwarf got agitated, and began to tell her how wicked he had been, it was curious that it never seemed to frighten Star the least bit in the world, but only to make her so very very sorry for him. 'Poor Dwarf!' she said; and when presently he put down his head upon his hands, and covered up his face, she softly began to stroke his rough coarse matted hair.

It would take me all the evening, Children, [said Cousin Trix,] if I were to tell you everything that Star and the Dwarf did during this day and the days that followed. I have told you enough already to show you that it was the beginning of a new life for the Dwarf, and the greater part of all the rest of it you must imagine for yourselves. How before long she changed the aspect of all the world to him ! think you can easily conceive. Even the love that he had had for Lord Edgar long ago was not so perfect and pure and beautiful as that which after a little while filled his whole soul for little Star, for the mere sight of Star,—the sound of her little childish voice that went singing through the house,—the touch of her little hand or of her lips, all seemed to have a power that was indescribable to banish from him every wicked feeling and every cruel thought. So passionately did he love her that it was at last as if the child's very nature had begun to grow into his, and as if when they sat together her spirit was passing into him. Strange thoughts that did not seem to be *his* thoughts used to come to him, and strange feelings that he had never known before, and that filled the poor, rude, almost lost heart with such passionate awe and joy that sometimes, though she tried to prevent him, he would fall down at the child's feet, and hide his face upon her knees, and break out loud into wild blessings on her.

By degrees the dark winter passed, and the short

days lengthened into spring. There never had been a spring in all the Dwarf's life before that came so early. Long before in other years the snow was wont to be off the ground, this year the buds were swelling in the forest, and violets and primroses were all in flower round the mossy roots of the old trees. It seemed like May while it was still March,—a warm, sunny, blue-skied May.

They used to go out and sit in the forest for hours together,—sometimes for nearly the whole of the long bright day. . 'Come out with me and play,' little Star would always say, and she would take the Dwarf by the hand and lead him away (for he cared for nothing in the world but to do what pleased her) wherever she liked ; but when she had brought him to some favourite seat, and had filled her lap and his with flowers, somehow they never went on playing very long.

'Dwarf, you are grown up, and must be very wise. Tell me something to make me wise too,' the child would say ; and then she would begin to ask him questions, and he would try to answer her ; but always, when any talk that they had together was ended, he knew in his heart that Star had taught him and told to him far more than he had taught her.

They were strange solemn beautiful things that Star would tell him,—stories of angels and good men, and tales of long endurance, and hope, and faith, and love. She told him of those who had spent their lives to make

the world a little happier and better ; of men who had died rather than lose sight of God ; of women whose love and heroism had made them great.

‘Star, where do you learn so many stories?’ the Dwarf would ask her sometimes.

But whenever the Dwarf asked that, the child would only softly smile and shake her head. She had a strange sweet far-off smile that used often to come when the Dwarf asked questions of her, and that never came without sending a sharp pang to his heart, for when Star smiled so the Dwarf knew there was a mystery between them that he could not see into, and that though she sat by his side, and held his hand, and laid her head upon his bosom, yet that it was only one-half of little Star that was his, or that he could understand.

Many and many were the thoughts during those days that came into the Dwarf’s mind about his future life. This present life in the forest—it was beautiful to him now, but yet something always seemed to be whispering to him that his work was waiting for him elsewhere. He who had been so cruel and full of hate, he must go back amongst his fellow-creatures and make them bless him. So one day at last (though half-sorrowfully, for the spirit was more willing than the flesh) he said to the child—

‘Star, shall we some day leave the forest and go into the world together—you and I?’

‘You shall go back to the world,—but not yet for a little while,’ answered the child softly.

And then when he would have gone on speaking she prevented him by beginning to sing one of her little songs.

She used to sing as sweetly and as naturally as the birds out in the forest. She would sing half the long day through, and day after day she always sang new songs, which were sometimes merry and sometimes sad, and always sweet. She used to try and teach them now and then to the Dwarf, but when the Dwarf began to sing he always made such a fearful croaking that Star would laugh outright. The poor Dwarf had no turn for music at all, but he loved better than most things on earth to hear the child sing, and sometimes the words of her little hymns and songs would stay with him (though the tunes would not), and all day long, or through the night even while he dreamed, they would go jingling on and ringing in his ears, and he would find himself, without thinking of it, saying the simple little verses over and over again, till at last, perhaps, quite suddenly, the loving tender meaning in them would sink into his heart, and take root there, and stay for ever after.

She used to put her arms every night about his neck and kiss him when she went to bed. There was often a wistful look in her face when she did this, and one night *at last* she said when she came to him—

‘I should like to kneel down here, and say my prayers.’ And she knelt down by the Dwarf’s side, and folded her hands and said them softly.

And then after that she always said them beside him, he sitting on his chair, and she kneeling down close to him with her hands upon his knees.

Many thoughts used to come into the Dwarf’s heart as he sat so and listened to her, and gradually and slowly vague desires within him grew into great earnest passionate longings, until at last one night, when the child as usual was going to kneel beside him, the Dwarf said, trembling—

‘Star, let us kneel together.’

And then, as they were kneeling side by side—

‘Little Star, pray for me!’ the Dwarf cried, sobbing, and covered up his face with his hands.

That night, when Star’s prayer was ended, there was a bright beautiful light shining in her eyes.

‘I am your child in very truth now!’ she said joyfully, and stretched up her arms to clasp them round his neck.

Yet, though she had been so glad to-night, when the next morning came there was a strange solemnity and tender sadness in the child’s look, and she went about all day softly and quietly, singing hardly at all, except one little plaintive song, which had something in it that sank, he scarcely knew why, like a sad sweet knell on the Dwarf’s heart.

‘Little Star, why do you sing nothing but that one song to-day?’ he asked her once, but the child only answered him with one of her mysterious far-off smiles, and, shaking her head, began the plaintive little tune again.

For a long time, when evening came, she sat at his feet, leaning her head upon his knees, and talking to him softly and tenderly. She had often sat so before, letting him stroke her golden hair. This evening, as the sun shone full upon her, it kindled all that golden hair so gloriously that to the Dwarf’s eyes a dazzling light seemed to come out from it, and it was as though there were a halo round the child’s head, like the halo about a saint.

‘I think I never yet saw the sunshine so bright,’ said the Dwarf, and shaded his eyes, for the light blinded him.

‘Nay, you shall see it brighter yet!’ the child replied with a joyful smile.

He knelt down by her side again when bedtime came, and once more little Star prayed. Then she kissed him and bade him good-night. But suddenly, when she had kissed him once, she turned back again, and looked him in the face, and kissed him a second time, and cried.

‘Star, why do you cry?’ the Dwarf asked, fearing he knew not what.

‘Because the world is so wide!’ the child said softly.

And then once more she kissed him, and went away slowly, but smiling through her tears.

That night the Dwarf had a strange, vivid dream. He thought that he was lying awake in his bed, when suddenly a soft unearthly light began to fill the room, which gradually grew brighter and more silvery than sunlight, till at last he could not look at it, and lay astonished, with his eyes closed, fearing and praying. And then presently a soft hand touched his forehead, and, looking up, he thought he saw the child standing by his bedside. But it was, and yet was not, his little Star. It was Star changed from an earthly child into an angel, with silver shining wings, and the bright glory of her hair all lifted up around her head into a burning golden cloud. The Dwarf lay with wide-open eyes and looked at her; and as he gazed it seemed to him that for the first time he knew who and what she was.

She stood for a few moments looking tenderly and sadly in his face, and then in a voice that was like the child's voice, and yet different—

'I have come to bid farewell to you,' she said, 'for my work here is ended now, and my Master has sent me on another journey. You have fought your fight, Dwarf, and won your battle! Go back now amongst the men whom you have wronged, and help to do justice in the earth. I would stay longer with you if I might; but I *cannot* stay!'

'You are not going from me!' the Dwarf thought

then that he cried out wildly ; but when he tried to rise and grasp at the child's robe he could not do it.

'Yes, I am going from you,' she answered softly and sadly. 'I must go to my work as you to yours, and you shall see my face no more. But when you are in trouble—when you need me—I shall be near you still.'

'And how am I to live without you? I cannot live! I cannot live!' the poor Dwarf cried.

But she laid her finger on his lips.

'Hush! You *will* live,' she answered gently. 'You will live to love others as you have loved me.' And then she stooped down over him, and, weeping, the Dwarf thought, as she did it, she kissed his brow. 'Farewell!' she said. 'You will go back, forgiven, to a new life. Farewell!'

The last word came like a soft, plaintive sigh, and as she uttered it it seemed to the Dwarf that the strange brightness all around her slowly began to fade away. As he strained his eyes to try and see her still through the gathering darkness, a mist came over them that made everything grow indistinct. He tried to rise or speak, and could not ; the cloud that was before his eyes seemed stealing upwards over his brain. He struggled for a few moments, but it was as if a great invisible power was fighting with him ; and at last the Dwarf fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

It was broad daylight when he again awoke, and the

sun was shining through his window. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. What strange terror was this that was hanging still about him? That vision in the night had been a dream; it *must* have been a dream, he said. His little Star, no doubt, had all the night been quietly sleeping in her bed. But yet the Dwarf's knees trembled as he rose and dressed himself.

The sun had been up for many hours: it was not the child's habit usually to sleep so late.

'Little Star, are you not awake?' he called out through the open door.

But no Star answered. With passionate haste the Dwarf threw on his clothes, and hurried into the room where the child slept: and then with a great cry, as if his heart would break, he fell down, wildly sobbing, on his knees beside Star's empty bed.

'And was she really gone, then? Oh, poor Dwarf!' cried little Mabel; and all the children seemed inclined to say 'Poor Dwarf!' too.

'And what in the world did he do, Cousin Trix?' asked Jack, who was very tender-hearted, and was wondering to himself what *he* should do if he were to awake one morning and find that there was no Queen Mab. 'Why, it was enough to make him as bad again as he had been before!'

‘Well, no, Jack, I don’t see that,’ replied Cousin Trix. ‘He had become bad before because the person he had loved best and believed to be good proved false. People don’t turn wicked—unless they are very weak and silly indeed—simply because they have something to bear that makes them very sad. Little good would Star have done to the Dwarf, if, as soon as he had lost her, he had shown his sorrow by making himself as bad again as he had been before she came! But I am happy to say the thought of doing such a thing never so much as crossed the Dwarf’s mind. The only kind of thing he thought of, on the contrary, was how he could lead such a life as should make him ever worthy to be where the child was again; and, for all the rest of the time he lived on this earth, that was what he cared about and strove for more than anything else.’

‘And did he leave the forest soon?’ asked Roger.

‘Yes; he left the forest almost immediately,’ answered Cousin Trix, ‘and went and took a house in a large town. And as soon as ever he had furnished it (which he did quite plainly, and merely hired a couple of servants; for, though he had returned to the world, he had no intention of ever living in it as a prince again), he began to look about him and see what work there was for him to do. And, I promise you, he was not long in finding plenty, for he soon discovered so many sorrowful people that he could help, and so many starving people that he could feed, that he had as much

upon his hands as filled all his time from morning to night.'

'But, Cousin Trix, when he was so dreadfully ugly, didn't he frighten everybody?' asked Daisy.

'Well, Daisy, I must confess that *was* a difficulty at the beginning,' replied Cousin Trix; 'and to tell the truth, when he came out of the forest he was so wild and hideous to look at that he quite scared the people out of the streets. But his very first act was to go into a barber's shop, where (though not without some difficulty, for the barber, who was a timid man, nearly fainted when he saw him) he got himself nicely shaven and trimmed; and then he sent for the most skilful tailor in all the town, who made him a suit of clothes so cleverly that when he wore them he looked straighter and taller and slimmer than he had ever done in all his life before. And though to the end of his days there is no denying that he continued to be remarkably plain, yet, as time went on, and as year after year he grew kinder and gentler and more full of charity to his fellow-men, it was wonderful how much of his original ugliness and deformity seemed to go out of the Dwarf's face, and how sometimes even a strange kind of beauty came into it, to such a degree that those who knew him best would actually declare that, in spite of its large coarse clumsy features, there were moments when it was like the face of an angel.

'And if this was ever true,' said Cousin Trix, after a

little pause, 'I myself should fancy that these were the moments when little Star was nearest to him, standing by his side perhaps, or holding his hand, or even, it might be, lying once more upon his bosom, as she had lain so often. For to *him*, at least, it often seemed as if she came back and stayed a little while with him; and often when he was weary he would call her, and would always, after he thought she had been near him, rise up again in a few minutes comforted and refreshed, and go back to his work with new heart and hope. Whether she really came to him, or whether he only fell asleep and dreamed that she did, of course, Children,' added Cousin Trix, 'I cannot say; but, for my own part, I think we may believe many worse things than that we have guardian angels near us.'

This was the end of Cousin Trix's story; but the children were made a little grave by her last words, and no one said anything for a few moments after they had been spoken. In half a minute or so, however, the gabbling little tongues, which were never silent long, had begun to wag again freely enough, and the children chattered to their hearts' content round Cousin Trix's chair till the dressing-bell rang.

The children had not guessed that it would be so, but the Dwarf's story was the last that Cousin Trix told them. She was too busy the next day to come

to the schoolroom for more than a few minutes, and for the two or three days after that she was too busy to come at all. She had her hands full of one thing or another from morning to night, and though the children contrived to hang about her a good deal, and impede her progress in various ways (as the manner of children is), yet they never caught her, in the schoolroom or out of it, in circumstances that made the telling of a story to them even possible.

And so her marriage-day came at last before another tale was told.



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